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MARGERY

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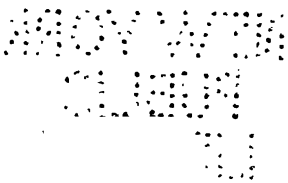

MARGERY

MARGERY

CHAPTER I

THE rain had ceased, and for the last half-hour a patch of yellow sunlight had been slowly travelling across the floor of Margery's room toward the bed on which she lay. It was a little difficult at first to see, so to speak, the plan of her, for her attitude denoted the extreme of despairing abandonment. A great mass of brown hair was tossed about the pillow, which was strangely rumpled and creased, and her face was somewhere buried in it below her hair. One long black-stockinged leg, however, stretched out at full length down the bed, gave a clue to her general geography; the other was tucked up beneath her; one hand thrown above her head grasped the brass rail of the bed, the position of the other was inconjecturable. On the floor, by the side of the bed, lay a handkerchief, pressed together into a little hard wet ball, having been cast away when it was no longer of any more use in drying her eyes, and from time to time the bed shook with a sob. But the sobs were not very frequent now. She had cried herself out, and lay still, spent and tired both physically and emotionally. The actual cause of her tears, though only half-an-hour-old, had a little receded in prominence. What chiefly filled her now was the sense of utter desolation, the fact that she alone

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cared, and that nobody else minded one atom. Child as she was, and trivial as might be the reason of her tears, she had there sounded the utmost depths of human woe: she had come upon the bed-rock on which all real misery is founded, namely, the sense of being alone in sorrow. And at the moment she gave voice to it.

"No — nobody cares," she moaned to her dumb and crumpled pillow.

Up to the present moment her verdict upon the probably universal heartlessness of mankind was backed by evidence that seemed overwhelming. Bellairs, her aunt's maid, for instance, had come with a message from Mrs. Morrison a quarter of an hour ago to the effect that she was going out driving at once, and that Margery might come if she was good, and, on seeing her state, all that Bellairs had of consolation and encouragement was "Now, to think of being such a cry-baby over a nasty little kitten at your age, too, miss." And in spite of the knowledge that there was some mystery about Bellairs's age, and that it was a subject on which inquiry was not courted, Margery had been too miserable to think of any smart and stinging reply. It was evident, however, from this that Bellairs did not care, while as for the matter of age, was everybody supposed to cease to love kittens because she had just celebrated her sixteenth birthday? It was evident, also, that Aunt Aggie did not care, since it was she who had ordered this ruthless and cold-blooded murder, and could dress up and go out for a drive immediately afterward; while as for Margery's cousin Olive, she never cared for anything that had four legs, nor much for those (except herself) that had two. Walter finally did

not care, in the first place because at present he did not know of the tragedy. But even if he had known, it was probable he would not have cared, for he had gone out this morning ferreting for rabbits, which he killed without the least compunction, if he was so fortunate as to hit. And rabbits were nearly as nice as kittens.

Margery had finished her crying, and she sat up and clawed her hair together in some sort of fashion, so that it did not fall over her face, and turned her pillow over. She was already a little ashamed at having cried, though not in the least ashamed of the anguish of mind which had caused her to do so. But she cried so very easily and with such abandonment, just as she laughed easily and uncontrollably. There were so many dreadful things in the world, just as there were so many hugely delightful and funny ones. But nothing seemed funny or delightful just now; the discovery that nobody cared whether a kitten was drowned led on to the discovery that nobody cared at all for anything, and, least of all, for her. This was depressing, and it seemed patently and awfully true. In all those six years since her mother had died, and she had come to live with Aunt Aggie, she felt now that she had never been wanted; nobody really cared whether she was happy or not. And she had all a child's passionate desire — in spite of the great tale of sixteen years which stood to her account — for happiness, though she added to that something more than a child's desire that other things — especially animals — should be happy too.

That brought her thoughts back to the subject of the kitten again, but solitary meditation on that dreadful incident was here interrupted, for she heard the sound of steps, or

rather jumps coming up the uncarpeted oak staircase to her room at the top of the house, and she knew who alone in this orderly establishment came upstairs like that. Then there came a sound exactly as if somebody had fallen down, and she ran to the door.

"Oh, Walter, what's the matter?" she cried.

A tall boy in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers lay sprawling on the corner landing just below the final flight of six stairs which led to her room.

"Oh, nothing!" he said. "I've only broken both legs. I was coming up to see you. Lord! I crossed shins with the last step. It's ever so much harder than iron."

Still sitting where he was, he gingerly pulled down his stocking and disclosed a brown strong leg on which was accurately marked the place where he had crossed shins with the stairs. Instantly Margery's sympathy went out to him and his hurt.

"Oh, I am sorry," she said. "Come and bathe it, and I'll tie it up for you."

"Oh, rot," said the wounded one. "It's all right."

"Oh, but you must. It will stick to your stocking, and the dye will get in. And I know I've got some lint, because when I fell out of the tree two days ago ——"

Walter laughed and limped up the remaining stairs. "I don't want any of your lint," he said, sitting down on the edge of Margery's bed, and pulling up his stocking again, "though thanks awfully. I say, Margery, what's been the matter? Bellairs told me you were lying on your bed and crying. There's no sense in crying, anyhow. What's up?"

Margery picked up her sopping handkerchief and checked

one of the ground-swell sobs, so to speak, that had succeeded to the storm of her crying. "It's the kitten," she said. "Tapioca had three kittens this morning, and — and Aunt Aggie ordered one to be drowned."

"Oh, well, that leaves two," said Walter, confident of his arithmetic, and hopeful on the score of consolation.

"Then you don't care either," said Margery, "just like all the rest of them. Why — why does that make it any better? What has the kitten done that they should drown it?"

"It had been born," said Walter. "Or, rather, three of them had been born; it was partly the fault of the others. Don't cry again."

"But you're all so cruel," said Margery, with tears and temper again rising. "It was alive, and why hadn't it the right to live? And its eyes weren't even open yet. It — it had never enjoyed itself. Why should Aunt Aggie have killed it? She wouldn't have liked it if somebody had put her in a bucket and drowned her when she was a baby. I wish somebody had."

"Then it's not very polite of you," said Walter. "I should never have been born at all if that had been done."

"Well, it was just as unpolite of Aunt Aggie to drown the kitten," said Margery. "And it was such a beastly morning to be drowned on."

Walter nursed his leg for a moment in silence; he was sorry that Margery was in trouble, but, on the other hand, he felt that the fact that two kittens survived, if rightly looked at, held the elements of consolation. For himself, he did not particularly care what happened to Tapioca or any of

her progeny, but since Margery did, since also it was only fair that he should do his best to console a pal in distress, he did not argue about cats in general or put forward his own view, namely, that they were, on the whole, to be regarded as nocturnal nuisances which one tried to hit with pieces of soap or anything handy, but set his brain to see the affair from Margery's point of view, and from that rather abstruse and mysterious position suggest anything within reason that could (since apparently the little Tapioca was gone beyond recall) reconcile his friend to her bereaved existence. He was older by a couple of years than Margery, but, in spite of occasional lapses into old-age and cynicism incidental to eighteen, essentially younger than she, not so subtle in thought, and ruder and less complex in emotion.

"Well, as I said, there are two little Tapiocas left," he repeated. "And — and I came an awful cropper up those stairs."

Margery became severely practical.

"I offered to bathe it and bandage it," she said, " and you refused. So don't blame me afterward. And it isn't the point that there are two kittens left. There might have been three if Aunt Aggie hadn't drowned one."

"Did mother drown it herself?" asked the boy.

"No; catch her. She told that — that beast Bellairs to tell Jim it was to be drowned. So — so I began to cry, and it was just before lunch, and I am so hungry now."

"Then you don't know for certain whether it was drowned?" asked he.

"No, you silly. You didn't expect me to go and look at them putting the little darling into a bucket of water. And

it hadn't even seen anything, not the sun, or moon, or anything nice," she said, her voice going up into a squeak of pity.

Walter got up.

"And you haven't had any lunch?" he asked.

"No; I couldn't eat when I was crying."

"Wait here, then," he said.

Margery's eyes brightened. It seemed that Walter had some plan. And she respected his plans enormously, for when he made up his mind about anything, something nice usually happened. It had been the same about the fireworks at the White City, which she longed to see. She had, on the score of a cold, been forbidden to go to them, but Walter had managed it somehow.

"Oh, you darling, have you thought of anything?" she asked.

"Only of all the things you didn't think of," he said. "I daresay it's too late. But I'll just go and see. No, you don't come with me. You stop here. I haven't had any lunch either, so I'll get something to eat anyhow."

"And about Tapioca's——" began Margery.

"Oh, shut up! I don't promise anything except food. But I promise you that. And it's so like you to cry about the kitten before you know whether it is drowned or not."

Walter could not resist that parting sarcasm, which, though sarcastic, was deeply rooted in truth. Margery always gave up and abandoned herself to despair long before there was the slightest necessity for doing so, just as she always ate the cream, so to speak, off a joyful occasion long before the occasion had arrived. Margery, in fact, as he thought to himself, as he ran downstairs again, had not got one ounce

of ordinary sense, though she had an imagination, and power of fantastic invention that made her an admirable comrade. Also — and this to the boy's mind was immensely important — she loved playing games, and though she hated being beaten, as every proper-minded person should, no stress of anxiety, no hopelessness of position would make her cheat. Once in a most ill-inspired moment he had accused her of cheating at croquet, and she had turned to him with a white face and a quivering lip. "Walter, how dare you?" she said, and he was left to continue the game alone, if he felt inclined. It was very different with his sister Olive; when she was accused of cheating, she said, "Well, it's only a game." The darks and changing lights in Margery's mind were more easily understandable than the chaos of soul revealed in those few simple words. But then Olive was quite grown up, over twenty, in fact, and it was no use in Walter's candid estimation trying to account for the curiosities of the adult mind. Indeed, the feminine mind in general was a puzzle to him, but he added, as a limiting clause, the intention of which was highly complimentary, that Margery was much more like a boy. Mrs. Morrison saw that, too, and had been known to ask. "Where are the boys?" By which she meant Walter and Margery. But there was no complimentary intention in her mind.

Walter had intended to finish his rabbit-shooting and return home for lunch, but the sport had been too exciting to leave, and consequently now at three o'clock he was possessed of such an appetite as the dyspeptic might dream of and awake from sheer happiness. But before making his inroad into the kitchen he trotted down the road to the

stables, where it was probable the execution of the superfluous kitten would have taken place, in case the sentence had not yet been carried out. While there was a chance of that, every second was important, and food — though that was important, too — must take a second place. It was absurd of Margery to make a fuss, and cry herself into knots like that, but in his young life he had already learned that in the general way it was better to take people as you found them, instead of attempting, probably without result, to argue them into becoming something different. Margery had felt like this with regard to the kitten's death, and it was the clear duty of a friend to avert that event if by any chance it had not yet taken place. So in a breathing heat he came to the stable-yard.

It was empty, dozing in the hot afternoon sun; pigeons patrolled on the slanting red-tiled roofs; the old stable-dog was basking in the sun, and, too content to move, gave but a thump or two of his tail on the flags as welcome to Walter, and from inside came only the whistle of some stableman. And even as Walter came up to the door, Jim, the groom, came out, with a bucket in one hand, a very small and faintly mewing thing in the other. While at his heels followed Tapioca, uneasy and querulous.

"Oh, good morning, Jim," said Walter. "I'm just in time it seems. You were going to drown that kitten, were n't you?"

"Yes, sir. Seems a pity, too, as they're all well-bred. But Mrs. Morrison sent orders ——"

"I know. Well, it's a mistake. Give it back to the old cat. You know you needn't say anything at all about it

and probably nobody will know, but if anything is said, say it was my orders, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You don't know any one who will want a cat when it's old enough to leave its mother, do you? Well, it doesn't matter. Just give it back to Tapioca, and let things slide."

Walter went whistling back to the house, rather glad to have done something for that very small and blind bundle of fur, but much more glad to have done something for Margery. But how helpless girls were! They sat down and cried instead of making sure that there was nothing to be done. True, it was easier for him to countermand his mother's orders than for Margery, but she might have ascertained whether there was anything to cry about before she proceeded to cry. But that course would have been rational, and so Margery did not pursue it.

Walter made a hurried inroad into the kitchen, and after a short interview with a slightly dignified scullery-maid obtained such things as would ward off starvation until tea-time, and thus heavy-laden went up to Margery's room again, where he received the sort of welcome which might be accorded to one who has averted by some swift stroke of diplomacy massacre of the most portentous kind.

"Oh, you are a darling and you are clever," she said. "And just to think of me lying howling here instead of going to make sure! Do you think Aunt Aggie will find out? Walter, I never tasted such delicious potted meat! What shall we do afterward? I'll do absolutely anything you wish."

A gleam of mischief sparkled in the boy's eyes.

"Right oh! I shall go ferreting again, then, and you shall carry the rabbits I shoot."

Margery gave a great gulp.

"All right," she said. "I promised I would."

Walter laughed.

"You needn't really," he said. "I only said that to test you. You're not a bad chap, Margery. I believe you would have come."

"Of course I should, though it would have been perfectly beastly of you to make me. Are you sure you don't want me to? Because I did promise."

"Quite sure. I'll toss you for that piece of cake that's over."

"No, I don't want it," said Margery. "Oh, do eat it — quickly, and let's go out. I've been in all the morning. Let's go to the stables first and congratulate Tapioca, and then — what next?"

"Oh, nothing; let's wander round and see what happens. Something is sure to. You'll fall into the lake or tear your frock."

"And you may laugh at me as much as you like if I do," said Margery warmly, "because you've been such a perfect angel about the kitten. Let's take our croquet mallets and lawn tennis things and golf balls in case we want them."

The two accordingly strolled down again to the stables, that lay behind a belt of trees some three hundred yards from the house. June and July had been very rainless, and now in early September the short sheep-cropped grass of the park, and the ranker growth of the shorn hayfields showed yellow and faded, like a green baize carpet from which the sun

has sucked the colour. The park where lay the nine holes of the little links stretched upward from the white Portland stone house, in gentle undulations, and a fine growth of beeches bounded the open grass. To the left rose the knoll where lay the rabbit-warren which had detained Walter that morning, while on the other side of the house was the flower-garden, toward which they wandered when the visit of congratulation to Tapioca was over. A cedar tree, magnificent in growth, stood in the middle of the lawn, dividing it into two, the extremity of its branches on the one side reaching close to the house itself, and on the other extending to the broad terrace walk that bounded the lawn. To the left of this giant vegetable a complicated network of flower-beds had for its centre a stone vase and pillar, while to the right the tennis and croquet lawn divided between them a stretch of admirable turf. From the far end of the terrace a little flight of steps led down to another undulating lawn with a fountain and basin of gold fish, on the edge of which a vulgar crowd of sparrows chirruped and chattered all day, much like the folk on the beach of some second-rate watering place, and from there a path led under an avenue of elms to the brick-walled vegetable garden a couple of hundred yards away. At the bottom of that in a hollow of Surrey downs lay the village of Ballards, nestling unseen in the elms of its gardens, while beyond the hills climbed upward again to the sky-line in the russet of the ripening harvest.

The sun was very hot, and the moisture of the rain that had fallen so copiously in the morning, making it a bad day to be drowned on, rendered exercise or even the agitated standing about on the croquet lawn a less excellent way of

passing the afternoon than sitting down and waiting for tea and subsequent coolness, and the two established themselves in long chairs underneath the thick fans of the cedar branches. Something of the trouble of the morning, though that had ended in Walter's triumphant *coup de chat*, still lingered about Margery, and reflected itself in a certain sombreness of expression both in conversation and face. Trouble still lingered in those big gray eyes, and in the curves of her mouth, features which even her aunt, who habitually took the gloomiest possible view of Margery's future, was forced to admit held promise. But clearly fulfilment either of promise or of disappointment was in the future yet for Margery. Her length of limb might promise superb womanhood, or on the other hand might portend only lanky maturity. Yet there was something about her, something vivid, something fruit-bearing that seemed to put the latter possibility into the very remotest corner of probability. Girlish and immature as she was, her immaturity promised not withering but ripeness. And though possibly she might wither into something quite dry and sapless, it was far more possible that she would mature into a beautiful and tender being. But all that lay within herself; a distinct personality was certainly there, one likely to ripen or wither on its own lines, no parasitic thing that flourished or decayed according to the health of that on which it was grafted.

Walter had abandoned a chair as insufficient for his long limbs, and lay on the fragrant cedar-needled ground beside her. Though he was two years her senior, the immaturity of his face was far more marked, and the tall, handsome

boy might — if this was a matter of a wager — far more easily grow into a merely pretty spoiled man, than might she grow into an ineffective woman. Probably in little things he would get his way, chiefly because he looked so pleasant and attractive, and in a minor fashion, as in the matter of the drowning of the kitten, because he could always be trusted to attend to details. But Margery, with her big gray eyes and quick, responsive mouth, held more of promise than he with the crispy curling hair, the short, straight nose, and the boyish indeterminate chin. At present, in the ordinary holiday pursuits of their summer days, there was no question as to who ordained the manner of passing the hours, for all Margery's eager soul was set on the instant accomplishment of Walter's wishes. But when, as now, they sat beneath the layered shade of the cedar, waiting for the coolness of the evening to make possible more active pursuits, it was the girl who was the stronger, her mind that led his, even though she seemed to depend on him. For she had come to the age, earlier reached by the measure of years by girls than boys, when the enchanted mists of childhood and the early years are beginning to be rolled away under the rays of the sun of life, and the undiscovered country, its hills and valleys, or its quiet, pleasant plains, show their lines and contours. Margery peered through the mists now unconsciously self-conscious, and revealing herself to him.

"Oh, Walter, and it's September already," she said rather dolefully, "and there's only a fortnight left before you go abroad. I don't know what I shall do when you go. There'll be nobody to play with."

"Well, there wasn't anybody to play with when I went back every half to Eton," said he.

"I know; but it's different now that you are going to Germany. I wish you needn't. And it seems to be a sort of milestone your leaving Eton, and going away to learn languages. And when you've learned them you'll go into the diplomatic service and live abroad again. Didn't you hate leaving school?"

"Yes; of course, it was the end of an awfully nice time. But after all one has to get older and get on, and do things."

"Yes, you lucky animal. You are a boy, you see girls haven't got to do things. They are stuck in rooms and told to keep still, until some man comes and takes them away. There's nothing that I wouldn't give to be a boy, except — except perhaps ceasing to be a girl. What a pity one can't be both."

"Oh, then there is some point in being a girl, is there?" asked he. "You settled there was none the other day."

"Because I felt like that. Now I feel differently. I want to be a girl, and yet be able to go ahead like boys. You see, girls when they grow up look after men, and are wanted to cheer them up and make them cosy and happy. It must be tremendous fun being wanted like that. That's where we score. We are wanted for what we are, but boys and men are only wanted for what they do; they cut down trees and drive engines, and make beer, and build houses. Then they aren't happy till we come and live in them."

"What awfully rum notions you get hold of," said Walter placidly. His own power of abstract thought or conversation was practically non-existent; when Margery, as

occasionally happened, launched into these confusing topics, he usually contented himself with small comments in the style of the Greek chorus, till the fit of philosophy was over.

"I don't see why it's rum to think about what goes on in the world, and what is going to happen to one," said she. "It's rather interesting. Besides, if you think very hard about a thing, and make up your mind what is going to happen, quite make it up, I mean, it usually does happen."

"Instance being," said he, "that you quite made up your mind that the little Tapioca was going to be drowned, and wept floods and floods, and then it wasn't."

Margery laughed.

"I can pull your hair quite easily," she said, "and you would have to get up in order to slap me. Oh, and another thing, Walter. I'm not going to cry any more, ever. It's — it's rather feeble, you know. And I'm sixteen."

"I told you it was feeble long ago," he said.

"I know you did. But it's a different affair to find out a thing for yourself, from having it told you. For instance, Aunt Aggie told me that girls didn't climb trees. I haven't found that out for myself yet."

"They fall out of them, too," said Walter, feeling himself more equal to this level of conversation.

"They very often don't, though. I think grown-up people sometimes forget what it feels like not to be grown up. That's where we score, because you and I can tell, quite easily, what it feels like to be grown up."

"Oh, are you quite sure of that?" asked he.

"Yes, of course; you don't want to play any more, and

you go to the office instead if you are a man, and go for a drive if you are a woman."

Walter considered this.

"I'm not absolutely sure you're right," he said. "It may be that you want to play as much as ever, only somehow you can't."

"That would be awful," said Margery. "Poor things, if that's what is the matter with them I am sorry."

Walter sat up and picked the brown little cedar-needles out of his stockings.

"They get along pretty well all the same," he said. "I've some two more years growing up than you have, you see, and I assure you it isn't a bit bad."

"Oh, nonsense," said Margery, speaking what to her was an intuitive conviction. "You haven't begun growing up at all. You're exactly the same as you always have been and a darling at that. So don't grow up yet, Walter. Let's play a little more first. Indeed, we might as well have a game of tennis at once before tea. You shall give me fifteen, and I shall give you the most awful beating. I'll pull you up."

Margery extended her two small brown hands to his two large ones, and, leaning back, raised him to his feet, and they stood there a moment, all four hands clasped, and he looking down smiling at her. And at that moment for the first time, he felt some impulse of particular tenderness toward her, different a little from the frank comradeship that had existed hitherto between them.

"Oh, you queer little animal," was all he said, but somehow the new feeling found expression in those very unsentimental words.

Walter came honestly, as the phrase is, by his stature and good looks, for his mother, still a year or two only over forty, was of that big superb order of beauty, so seldom seen outside the Anglo-Saxon races, which, magnificent though it is from a purely spectacular standpoint, too often seems, like a nonsense riddle, to mean nothing whatever. Processes of thought, no doubt, went on during her waking hours, in her mind, since a mind in which no thought goes on is the mind of the idiot, and she was not an idiot, but the thoughts that passed through her brain were numerically few, and made their way, so to speak down the same hard, well-worn channels which they had dug there. It was doubtful whether she was capable of grasping any new idea, it was quite certain that she was incapable of initiating one. Nor could she put an old idea into a new setting, or regard it from a different standpoint, or let it flow down some channel of her brain other than the one to which it had been accustomed. Her mind would, in a word, have made a magnificent model for any psychological artist who wanted to depict the spirit and essence of conventionality. Whatever she did, she did because it was the Thing, and wasted no more thought about it, nor considered whether the Thing in any particular instance ministered either to her pleasure or her profit. Otherwise (apart that is from her uncompromising and unswerving loyalty to the Thing), she was almost emotionless. But then the Thing was an exacting deity demanding practically incessant worship from its devotee; from prime to compline, so to speak, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night, the hours had to be passed in service of the Thing. And even when Mrs. Morrison was

safe in bed of a night, she did a little deep-breathing, for just now that was the Thing, too.

The case of these conventionalists, even when they are not of the first water, as Mrs. Morrison was, is a very curious one. In youth (or so the observer would have thought) life and love must have come knocking at their doors, but the touch of such things, as make the majority of mankind human, seem but to turn the conventionalist to wood. There are curious lakes which we read about in books of physical geography that have the property of petrifying whatever is put in their unnatural waters, instead of softening it, and perhaps a correspondingly barren process is the effect which life has on such natures as these. Experience, whether of sorrow or happiness, seems not to have softened them; it has only made them more impenetrable; they would seem to be freaks and exceptions from all known psychic laws; they are like the iron "that did swim." For though iron, they certainly manage, in the stock phrase, to swim very decently. It is indeed rare that they have what a warmer-hearted section of the race would call friends, but they get along very well with their acquaintances, and live a most decent and well-ordered life. And though it is difficult to imagine them as ever having been really young, it is quite easy to imagine the latter part of their lives. They get a little woodener every day, and then, having long ago parted with all that can be called life, it may be conjectured and hoped that they die without the slightest struggle or difficulty. For it would be a pathetic thing if, having practised being dead so long, the moment of death seemed to them upsetting or unfamiliar.

Mrs. Morrison had married very young, and married very well, her unfortunate husband having been a man of the most placid and amiable disposition, of large fortune honestly and even laudably acquired by his father by the process of brewing immense quantities of perfectly sound beer. His wife had set about her duties at once, and given him two children. She then, it may be supposed, proceeded to stupify him to death, buried him, and refrained from marrying again, for the sake, she said, of her children, whatever that might mean. Without any desire, however, to be uncharitable it may be conjectured that it suited her own sake very well to remain unmarried, since she had the complete control and expenditure of her late husband's fortune, up till the time that Walter should come of age, if she remained single, whereas the control of it passed into the hands of other trustees and was alienated from her for ever, should she settle to stupify some other man. It must be added, in justice to her, that she was by no means inordinately fond of money, but, on the other hand, she was certainly not inordinately fond of anything else. Thus, though it was not probably directly because the control of this fortune would pass from her that she did not marry again it certainly entered her consciousness that she was very comfortable as she was. She always went to church on the anniversary of her husband's death, even though it occurred next door to Sunday, on which day she always went to church twice, and never dined out, even though the most attractive table had a place ready to be laid for her. On this point, indeed, she went beyond what any known code of convention indicated, for she was of that most superior order of con-

ventionalists who can follow out and develop already existing conventions, until they almost become inventions of their own.

Olive, her only daughter, at the age of twenty was exactly the sort of girl who might have been reconstructed by some German savant who had never seen her, but who had been furnished with a report on her father, her mother, and her education. As might have been expected, she knew French and German very fairly well, and could converse in either tongue with perfect accuracy (though she had no more to say in them than she had in English), played the piano decently, for the German governess who had succeeded the French governess — they had both stopped for three years, and were then dismissed, with excellent characters — was competent to instruct her; she rode the bicycle, since at one time everybody rode bicycles, knew a good deal about flowers, because for a year or two it had been fashionable to spend the morning with leather gloves and a hoe in the garden, and was now learning to play golf under the supervision of a neighbouring professional who gave her lessons twice a week, with her mother as chaperon, sitting on the bank of some adjoining bunker. In person she was tall and handsome, herein taking after her mother, and in character (originally anyhow) amiable and tremendously dull like her father. Her dulness indeed was less a lack of such qualities as interest, curiosity, and the rapture of living, than a positive quality in itself, so remarkably solid and unyielding was it. Nothing, in fact, which was merely an absence of other things, could account for so positive a habit of mind. But in the last five or six years her original amiability had undergone a slight change. She was gradually

becoming a little querulous, a little jealous and exacting. That may have been a natural development of her nature, the ripening of seeds that were already there, but it was more probably a sort of fermenting or rotting process going on in her mind. For her mind was of quite decent intelligence; she had learned languages, music, the use of the bicycle with decent ease, and these things were like fruits kept in a dark room; they were never used or eaten. Probably they were going a "little bad," and this affected her nerves deleteriously.

In this short inventory of Olive's mind, it may have been noticed that there were certain objects there, which, so to speak, were labelled "fashionable," which accounted for their presence. That brings us to Mrs. Morrison's one and only weakness. Her conventionality (if we may regard it as a plant) was crossed with a vague sort of ambition. She wanted — though she did not know how to set about it — to shine in a social way, and though her innate conventionality was quite enough to make her always do the Thing, from time to time she cast glances at the gallery, as embodied in such papers as give little personal paragraphs about those in whom their readers — though they know them not — are supposed to be interested. She had the tastes, if not the aptitude, of a climber, but it is to be feared that, properly considered, the pinnacle toward which she had for so many years been planting her feet, was less of a pinnacle than a treadmill. She seemed to be climbing; her feet were always being lifted, as it were, to a higher place, yet she never got any higher. But here her entire lack of imagination stood her in good stead, and she did not worry about this inex-

plicable phenomenon. She went on year after year giving her rather dreary parties, and being regularly asked out to others, and possibly it never occurred to her that nothing particular was happening. She was Curzon Street in London, and county (or thereabouts) in the country. That seemed to her quite satisfactory; the county always came to her ball at Christmas, and though she had no ballroom in town, she gave half a dozen dinner parties during the season, for which she had not the slightest difficulty in furnishing her table with guests, although they tended to leave rather punctually at eleven. Similarly, also, she seldom failed to get a couple of men to come with her and Olive to their box at the opera when it was her night. Thus, since she wanted little that was on a higher or indeed a lower plane than such things as these, she had a very pleasant and comfortable time; it was exactly as pleasant (as is true in the case of most of us) as she was capable of imagining and as comfortable as any reasonable amount of cash and good health could make it.

It is always rather wonderful, if we consider the matter, how most people can find sufficient topics to make conversation animated during the greater part of the day, and that they do so is a testimonial to the automatic ingenuity of the human mind. But in the case of people like Mrs. Morrison, whose mental equipment is so very slight and so little varied, the thing becomes a portent. It is a fact, however, that she was not only seldom at a loss for matters to speak of, but was perfectly capable even of sustained soliloquy. Such soliloquies, it is true, might be of the nature of "running on," but there was no doubt that on she ran. To-day, as

she and Olive returned from their drive, her remarks were more full of new matter than usual, for they had been to call on some residents newly arrived in the neighbourhood, and as they had found them at home, there was a good deal to say. They drove, it may be mentioned, in a very large landau, with a pair of fat middle-aged horses to pull them, a stout coachman to control their destinies, and an impassive angular footman to take the air, and, if necessary, open gates.

"A very pleasant addition to our neighbours, Olive," said Mrs. Morrison, "and evidently very refined, cultured people. Mrs. Leveson looks very young to be the mother of that man, who I am sure must be well over thirty. And yet one cannot tell; he may look older than his age, or, on the other hand, she may have married very young. I am sure I have seen people look very much surprised to know that I was the mother of you and Walter, until I told them that I was married out of the schoolroom, one may say. And Mrs. Leveson is an honourable; there was a letter for her on the hall-table, which I could not help seeing the address of when I laid my parasol down. Remind me to look her up in Debrett when we get home. I always put my parasol down in the hall when I pay a call; it is sometimes very awkward to know where to put it if you carry it into the drawing room with you.

"Mr. Leveson, I gather, is a great student, though I could not ascertain what it was he studied. He said he always worked in the morning, and seldom got out before lunch, when I told him I always made a point of having a little walk before lunch, but I did not like to ask him what it was he worked at the first time of meeting him. It would have

sounded inquisitive, and there is nothing I hate more to appear than that. Perhaps it is too much study that makes him look older than his years. People very often age quickly if they use their brains too much."

"We don't know yet whether he does look older than he is," remarked Olive, "as we do not know how old he is."

"No, dear, I was saying that it was either that, or that his mother must have married very young, as I did. I should not wonder if she married very young, for she clearly must have been a pretty girl, and probably bright and attractive. She has evidently travelled a good deal, too, and said they were going out to Egypt again in December. That shows they have been there before. She would not say 'again' if this was their first visit. I daresay they have been several times. Perhaps her son's work is connected with Egypt — Egyptologists are they not who study hieroglyphics and the dynasties? Your poor father had a scarab, I remember, which he was very proud of, but he lost it in the underground. He often wondered who found it, if it was ever found. I noticed Mrs. Leveson called her son Arnold. That is not a very common name. I remember a footman came to us who was called Arnold, but I said he must be James as usual. It is very hard to get good footmen now."

"It is easy to get bad ones," said Olive. "At least, Walter says his clothes are never properly brushed."

Mrs. Morrison had nothing to say on the subject of brushing clothes, and for half a mile or so the slow, heavy trot of the fat horses was unbroken by the sound of human voices. Then it occurred to Mrs. Morrison that it was Walter who

said his clothes were never properly brushed, and she started off on him and the kindred subjects which he suggested.

"I am surprised Walter did not come in for lunch," she said, "though I do not the least anticipate that some accident has happened. I should be most uncomfortable if such a thought really occurred to me. No doubt he had good sport, and forgot to look at his watch. He is very careless about time, so I gave no orders about things being kept hot for him. If people are not punctual they must not expect to be waited for, or fresh trouble given to the servants. I very much dislike giving extra trouble to the servants, or doing anything which they could think out of the common. I am sure they gossip so much, and wonder why one does this or that, if it is not one's regular practice. That is why I refused Mrs. Leveson's offer to give us tea. It had but just struck four, and I felt sure their regular tea-time could not be four, unless they are the kind of people who dine at seven, which I did not think very likely. People used to dine at seven when your father and I first married, but even then it was going out, and anything like a dinner party was at a quarter to eight at the earliest."

"How very odd that must have been," said Olive. The words sounded slightly iced, but they were not meant to be of any discouraging temperature. It was merely that she had nothing whatever more to say on the subject of dining at a quarter to eight. It, like many other things, did not in the least interest her.

The mention of dinner roused a very stout gray pug that reclined on a cushion on the opposite seat of the carriage, and she sat up and gave three short asthmatic barks.

"She caught the word dinner," said Mrs. Morrison. "It is wonderful how sharp she is. But I think I must get rid of Flo. I notice that nobody has ordinary pugs now. If you have a pug, it must be a Japanese pug."

"Flo would not be very happy in a new home," said Olive.

"She shall not have a new home," said Mrs. Morrison. "She is very old, and very rheumatic. It is no kindness to let dogs live to be miserable."

Some slight hint of compassion came over Olive's face at this.

"She is hardly old enough to kill yet, is she?" she asked, speaking of her as if she was a fowl or a calf. "And Margery would make such a dreadful fuss."

"Margery's making a fuss is no reason for letting a dog live in misery," said Mrs. Morrison. "And Flo breathes so that I often think she will have an apoplectic fit and pass off in her sleep. But there is no reason why I should not see about getting a Japanese pug, even if Flo is not destroyed. And if it would make her jealous to see another dog taking her place about the house or when I go out driving, she can go to the stable, and be comfortable enough there. Bellairs tells me that she is dropping her hair so, that it often takes her a half-hour to get her cushion fit to be seen again to come out."

Flo, after her wheezy acknowledgments of the word "dinner," had sunk back on her cushion again, and her snores drowned the clip-clop of the slow-trotting horses.

"Or I would give Flo to Margery," said Mrs. Morrison, after a pause. "She could live in the schoolroom then, and be left with the caretaker here when we go up to town. Mar-

gery would like Flo, I am sure. It will make up to her for the kitten I ordered to be drowned this morning. Margery was ridiculous about it, and ate no lunch, but whoever heard of keeping three kittens? One is always drowned. I daresay Margery had lunch with Walter when he came in from rabbit-ferreting."

An unbiassed bystander taking intelligent note of the various schemes for Flo's future might be led to think from them that Mrs. Morrison was innately kind of heart, since these plans were, on the whole, constructed in a crescendo of probable felicity for Flo. The destruction of Flo, that is to say, was succeeded by a plan for letting her live at the stables, and the stables were supplanted by the schoolroom, while the schoolroom plan appeared to be based on an impulse of thoughtfulness for Margery. Such a series of suppositions would appear to be logical enough, but though it held water logically, it would be in reality utterly fallacious if taken to represent the various stages of thought which passed through that lady's mind. Flo's future, as a matter of fact, was entirely without interest to her, and Mrs. Morrison only developed her plan of increasing kindness on the lines of least resistance. It was quite certain that Margery would, as Olive had said, make a fuss if Flo was destroyed, and Mrs. Morrison would always prefer (though not very vividly) to have no fuss rather than have one, provided only that the result was the same with regard to her general wishes, as she had intended. Here her intention was to be rid of Flo, in order to get the Japanese pug which was the latest "note" in dogs, and Flo at the stables was as good as Flo in the ground. But Flo in the schoolroom would be as good as

Flo in the stables, and since Mrs. Morrison was not unkind, but only not kind, she had no objection to giving to Margery what she did not want herself. And then a charming thought occurred to her.

"It was Margery's birthday last week," she said, "and she was sixteen, though I am sure she behaves like a child still. I will give her Flo as a birthday present, only Margery must not take her up to town. Flo cost me seven pounds, I remember, and I received a pedigree with her. I daresay Bellairs can find it."

Then having found a scheme of kindness which so far from costing her anything, relieved her of a burden, she became quite warm-hearted over it.

"That will please Margery very much," she said, "and it will certainly console her for that kitten. She is such a child, and I want to make her childhood happy. I will give her Flo's cushion, too, though of course Bellairs cannot be expected to brush it. Bellairs shall make a new cushion for my Japanese pug, though I am sure that Flo's cushion would do well enough. But I should like to give Margery that cushion, and Flo also is used to it. She might not sleep so well on another."

Again the fat horses trotted along in silence; Mrs. Morrison was intent on examining her plan to see if it implied anything that could possibly be inconvenient to herself, and Olive had nothing to say on the subject. The sunshine of this September afternoon disposed toward benevolence, and Mrs. Morrison, since she could see no possible objection to what she had already planned, was spurred on to a fresh kindness.

"I will give Margery Flo's brush and comb also," she said, "and get a new one for my Japanese pug. Dogs do not like things that have been used by other dogs. Of course, Margery must brush Flo every day; she would be miserable without it, and Bellairs cannot be expected to look after two dogs. One must consider the servants."

The trot of the fat horses subsided into a walk, and they came to a standstill at the gate of the lodge. The footman got down and rang the bell, for Mrs. Morrison kept all the lodge gates locked, and the bell tinkled drowsily into silence, without answer. Though the sun was only pleasantly warm while the carriage was in motion, it was hot while standing still, and before the bell was answered, a motor had passed raising a cloud of dust, and Flo again sat up and coughed wheezily.

"I am not sure that Flo had not better be destroyed before the winter comes on," said Mrs. Morrison. "She suffered very much from bronchitis last winter, and why do they not answer the bell? I have often thought that Mrs. Blundell is past her work, and her husband is usually laid up, so that I do not see what they do for us. Ring again, Alfred."

Alfred rang. There was another long pause.

"It is ridiculous if one cannot get into one's own lodge gates," said Mrs. Morrison. "I am sure the bell at Mrs. Leveson's was answered quick enough. And the sun is grilling. Ah, there is somebody. Stop when we get through, Parkins," she said to the coachman.

A rather slovenly old woman curtsied as the carriage passed, and came up to it again, as it stopped.

"We rang twice," said Mrs. Morrison.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but with Blundell being ill again ——" began the old lady.

"Tell Blundell I wish to see him when he is better," said Mrs. Morrison. "Drive on, Parkins."

"One may carry kindness too far," said Mrs. Morrison. "It is years since Blundell was worth his wages. I cannot see why one should pay for work that is not properly done. Pauperization, is it not called, like giving to beggars in the street? I remember reading an article about it, which put it all most clearly."

Olive considered this.

"I don't know if you mean pensions or pauperization, mother," she said. "I think the article you read was about pensions."

"I have read several articles lately," said her mother.

This was unanswerable, for since she had read several it was quite impossible to prove that one might not have been about pensions and another about pauperization, and the horses again dropped into a walk as the carriage began to mount the scarcely perceptible incline that led through the fields at the garden side of the house. Beyond them lay the long flower bed below the terrace, a conflagration of the vivid hues of autumnal flowers, and behind, the white house screened by the huge sombre mass of the great cedar cast its shadows far out over the garden. The sun was already low above the hills to the west, and the little wisps of feathery cloud that floated there were tinged with pink, and the blue of day was beginning to fade into the aqueous green of sunset. To Mrs. Morrison these signs of the approach of evening were but a reminder that it must be late, and she looked at

the little gold watch set in a bracelet on her smooth plump wrist.

"I declare it is nearly six," she said, "and we should almost have done better to have had tea with Mrs. Leveson. The horses are getting slower every day, and I have often thought they are almost past work, though the delay at the lodge of course detained us. I am not sure that I should not do better to part with them, and get a motor this autumn. Parkins would have to go too; I could not trust him at his age to learn to drive. I am sure I should never be comfortable sitting behind him for fear something might happen, and he should lose his head. I think we will put off dinner till a quarter past eight, Olive. It will be six o'clock before we get tea. Probably Walter and Margery will have had tea. We must have a fresh tea-pot up, if it has been standing long. But perhaps they will have waited tea for us. We shall soon know."

This agitating suspense was not of long duration, for it appeared that Walter and Margery, so far from having had tea were not ready for it yet, for they were getting near the end of a set of tennis of the most hideously critical sort. Tea had been laid under the cedar, and Mrs. Morrison, while waiting for the men to come out, strolled up to the court, and standing firmly within the base line during the progress of a rally, began to tell Margery of the delightful birthday present she had planned for her.

"It was your birthday last week, was it not, Margery?" she began. "How very hot you look ——"

Walter returned the ball on the other side of his mother, so that Margery could not really get a fair shot at it.

"Oh, Aunt Aggie, please," she said breathlessly. "It's six, five, and if I win the next two points —— Walter, I think I could have got that. May I have a let?"

Walter wanted to win nearly as much as his cousin.

"Oh, mother, do get away," he said. "We've nearly finished. Yes, of course, it's a let, Margery."

Mrs. Morrison slowly crossed the court.

"I had only come to tell Margery about a birthday present I had planned for her," she said, "but as she does not seem to care to hear about it, there is no necessity for me to worry her with it."

Margery made a little comic gesture of despair. "Oh, it isn't that, Aunt Aggie," she said, brushiug the hair from her face, "and it is too dear of you. But you see it is so exciting. May I hear about it at tea? We shall have done in a minute if only I can win these two points."

Mrs. Morrison had worked herself up to believe that she was doing an immensely generous thing, in giving Margery not only her valuable dog, but its cushion and brush and comb, and felt that her kindness was being met with ingratitude. But she often told herself that Margery had not got a grateful nature, and this was but an instance the more of a trait she had so frequently noticed and deplored. She herself, however, was not the woman to go back upon a generous resolve because it was not suitably responded to; she only wondered, as she went back to the tea-table under the cedar, whether, if Bellairs washed Flo's brush and comb thoroughly, they would not do for her new dog quite well. It would not do that Margery should get in the habit of expecting a present like this every year.

A wild howl from the tennis court interrupted her prudent reflections, and observing Margery throwing her racquet into the air, Mrs. Morrison concluded she had won. It was strange how excited she got over a little thing like a game. Olive remarked this too.

"I wish you would speak to Margery about screaming," she observed. "If we all screamed when we were pleased, it would be impossible to hear what anybody said."

But Mrs. Morrison did not pay much attention to this, for Margery's voice broke in:

"Oh, Walter, you darling! I did play well, didn't I?" she cried. "You don't mind my winning, do you?"

Walter had jumped the net and joined her, and Mrs. Morrison saw Margery put her arm round his neck as they strolled toward the tea-table together. She could not hear his reply, but he said something, smiling into her face which was close to his.

"I think it is a good thing that Walter is going away to Germany soon," continued Olive in her colourless even voice. "He encourages Margery to be a romp."

And Mrs. Morrison, though for different reasons, found herself thinking too that it was not a bad thing.

The evening air soon grew rather damp, and before long Mrs. Morrison went into the house, to rest for a little before dinner, as she made it her invariable habit to do. But her resting was but a quiescence of the body; her mind during those periods of recuperation was as active as ever, and she often read many pages of a novel while she was repairing the exhausting effects of the day. But this evening she took

with her a volume which she hoped would prove at least as exciting as the story in which she was at present somewhat sluggishly reading, and proceeded to find out in what manner Mrs. Leveson was an honorable. And she became very much interested, for the information was thoroughly sound and satisfactory. She had married the only brother of Lord Northwood (who was a bachelor with no fewer than three addresses), and had issue Arnold John, born 1877. There was but little information about the present title holder, but what little there was, was satisfactory since he was seventy-one years of age, and Mrs. Morrison's gaze went back to Arnold John again. She had been well grounded in arithmetic when she was a girl, and it required no effort on her part to see that he would be thirty-two next birthday, which occurred in November. "His mother should be looking out for a wife for him," she said to herself. "I shall see to it that Walter is married before he is thirty-two. But some mothers have a very low idea of their duty to the children." She, at any rate, had not, and closed the book thoughtfully.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS now six years since Margery, as has been mentioned, came to live, on her mother's death, with her father's sister-in-law. He, Norman Morrison, had died while she was still scarcely of an age to remember him, and the very faint childish memories which she retained of the tall man with a ringing, jovial laugh, were not, it may be mentioned, kept alive or supplemented by fresh information in her new home. For he had not been what is called much of a comfort to his family, having run through his fortune, which had been an adequate one, with extreme celerity, and, while its dissolution was in course of process, having married a lady who was intimately connected with the stage. That she was a girl, in the common phrase, as good as gold, did not in the eyes of his family make this step less of a disgrace; and his marriage had been the final cause of estrangement between him and his brother. Leonard Morrison, good-natured and amiable as he was, would not, probably, if left to his own judgment, have taken so extreme a view of this step, but he had to reckon with the feelings of his wife, concerning which there was no room for any kind of doubt. For in Mrs. Morrison's view there were certain things which no person with the slightest claim to respectability could do, and in the forefront of these was to marry an actress. She did not doubt perhaps that it was possible, in the merciful dispensation of Providence that actresses could be saved,

but that was one of the things that Providence had to manage without her aid. Of course if an actress attained such eminence that she became, so to speak, a public institution and was asked to garden parties, it was a totally different matter, but actresses of the ballet type, which was the type which Norman had allied himself with, were people who had no existence that she was aware of. They probably lived and breathed, and married and had children, as was the case here, but they belonged to that underworld about which she preferred to be ignorant. And the man who married one was sucked into the underworld, too.

Leonard Morrison had died very soon after his brother had committed this social suicide, and when, a few years later, Norman also finished with the affairs of this transitory life, it was no wonder that his wife, who was well aware of her sister-in-law's feelings on these subjects, sooner than apply to her for aid, went back, like the gallant little soul she was, to her profession, in order to win bread for herself and her little Margery. But the struggle, though she had fought it gallantly and without failure, had been a hard one. The five years of her married life had aged her, and instead of the success which her youth and girlish good looks and gaiety made so easy, she found it difficult now to get engagements which enabled them to live, even with the strictest economy, in moderate comfort.

But she had managed it so that Margery in those five years had never guessed that there was a struggle at all, or that the beloved mummy had anything whatever to worry about, still less that the little ornaments and trinkets which sometimes mysteriously disappeared were not given away,

as was represented, to the little girls who had not got a mummy of their own, but found their way to a dingy, unromantic miscellaneous shop just round the corner.

Poor gallant little Jeannie Morrison had done far more than to conceal from Margery the difficulties of living even in such squalid sort of comfort as was possible; she had not only concealed, but she had constructed, so that to Margery even now those five years seemed a sort of fairy existence. The week of working days was always a busy time for her mother, for the evenings were spent in the theatre when she had an engagement and the mornings were often taken up with rehearsals, but every week brought its Sunday with a walk in the Park if it was fine, and enchanting stories about the real state of things, how that the shining Serpentine was a lake really belonging to Margery. It would pass into Margery's possession again, when a certain mysterious personage called Ogibogi had burst (as all witches eventually did from their own spite or malice), and she would build on the north shore of it a palace entirely composed of agates (agate being the material of which a precious little brooch which had lately disappeared was made). There would then be a theatre next the dining-room, so that mummy could always dine at home, and not have to go out of an evening when it was wet. The ducks and swans too in the Serpentine all belonged to Margery; it was that fact which they acknowledged when they came near to the shore where she was standing, and dived their heads into the water. They were really bowing to Margery, and acknowledging her as their mistress. But they had to make their obeisance in this rather abstruse fashion as long as Ogibogi was still

exercising her malign sway, otherwise she would kill them and eat them for supper, beak and feathers and all. Or sometimes they left London behind altogether of a Sunday, and went into a dark tunnel called Undy Groun, which it needed a little courage to face with equanimity, though Margery knew that when they had finished with Undy Groun, they would come to a place called Richmond. There was a hill there which had to be climbed, but at the top was real fairyland — a great park with deer in it, and great lakes, and thickets of rhododendrons which the fairies painted every Saturday night in every hue of red and mauve, so that Margery should admire their handiwork on Sunday morning. They ate their lunch there under the trees; and the bread was manna, and the little bits of meat the food of the gods, and the ginger beer the milk of Paradise. And in the evening they would return by Undy Groun, or sometimes walk to Putney and take a 'bus from there, and stop at some church and enter and hear the most beautiful music, and say prayers which, though but dimly understood by the child, had the fragrance of incense about them, and the sense of some protective presence. And on Sunday evening she always said her own private prayers to her mother, addressing them, it is to be feared, more to her than to the orthodox quarter. On week days the sumptuousness of such prayers was denied Margery, for she had to be in bed and asleep before her mother got home from the theatre, and week-day prayers were a little dull and listless in consequence. But on Sunday, after the two had been to Richmond Park, and had in the evening sat in some church, gorgeous with lights and resonant with song, prayers were a different affair.

"Make me a good child to mummy," was the last petition, and mummy always answered, "Make me a good mummy to my child. Amen." And magic, sweet, clear magic, hung about the memory of those evenings still.

In those five years between the death of her father and that of her mother, Margery had never heard a harsh word. She was quite as naughty as all high-spirited children ought to be, she had fits of temper, she once stole seven lumps of sugar, she was disobedient, tiresome, fractious. But she never provoked anger or impatience in her mother; the worst that ever happened was that mummy was sorry. Once or twice, as when she stole the sugar, mummy was so sorry that she could not speak, and there were hours that Margery could not remember now without a swelling of the throat and imminent tears. Quietly and slowly she had guessed by this time what those five years were to her mother, while she herself was living in a fairyland; and, more or less, she knew now about them. But until her mother's death, when she was ten, no hint of want or difficulty had ever reached her; she had led an existence exciting, thrilling, full of delicious surprises, and radiant with love, and above all instinct with compassion for all that was ailing, unhappy, ugly, all were suffering, as the earlier childish tradition went, from the evil influence of that dreadful Ogibogi, who assuredly would some day burst with so loud a bang that the deer in Richmond Park would stop grazing and their horns would drop off. For a couple of years before that, Margery had known in vague childish fashion that Ogibogi was but an allegory, a sweet invention to account for such things as occurred contrary to what was wished for, but,

after all, there was nothing better to be said about untoward events than that they were the malific workings of Ogibogi, and the myth had held its own.

Then, one evening, as Margery was preparing to go to bed, her mother had come in, looking very white.

"I had to leave the theatre, darling," she said, "because I did not feel very well. Mr. Deempster was very kind; he will keep me my place till the end of the week. But I am so tired. Do I look strange, dear?"

Margery was not alarmed at the moment, but at this she looked up at her mother, and saw what she had not seen before. That dear face looked tense, anxious, troubled. And next moment her mother had swayed and fallen. It was not Ogibogi now; it was kind, swift death, painless and soft, with hand of healing and comfort.

The day or two after that was still to Margery a confused unrememberable time. Other folk had come in from the flats above and below, and she had been treated kindly with all the sympathy of the poor for the poor. She had seen her mother once more, lying on her bed, looking very young and contented. There were little bunches of flowers on the sheet that covered her, and a decorous silence reigned. And then quite suddenly she understood; she had been told that her mother was dead, but for a day or two that meant nothing. Now, on this morning, when they were going to take her away, she comprehended. So she asked to say her prayers, and, as so often before, she said, "Make me a good child to mummy." And then came the passion of weeping.

A stiff, tall lady arrived either on this day or the next, and Margery was told to be a good girl and come away to her

new home, and see her cousins. Mummy had already gone, and there was nothing here to wait for, and she went quite quietly. They drove at first through familiar streets, and then through streets that were emptier and rather desolate, and the carriage drew up in a street that could hardly be called a street at all, so quiet and dismal was it. Then a very big front door was thrown open, and she followed the tall, stiff lady into an immense hall, where stood two immense motionless men with curious-coloured waistcoats and white shirt fronts. There were also a boy and a girl both older than she, and the tall stiff lady said:

"Olive, this is your cousin."

Olive kissed her on the cheek, and Margery noticed at the time that her lips were rather hard.

"Good evening, Cousin Margery," she said.

Then the boy in Eton jacket came forward quickly and shyly, holding out both hands.

"Oh, I say, I am glad you have come, Margery," he said. "We've been expecting you, and tea is ready. Aren't you hungry?"

And the tall, stiff lady said, "Walter, Walter."

All this, the five years of enchanted childhood when she lived with her mother in a bare but fairy world, the bliss and magic of it, the kindness and love and tenderness, was part of the Margery of to-day, essential to her, as indissoluble from her as her bones or her blood. That evening, too, when the old life ended and the new life in the great house in Curzon Street began, was partly her likewise, the well-meant but rather horny kindness of her aunt, Olive's conventional welcome, and the shy eagerness of Walter to make

her feel at home. And when knowledge of what those earlier years had really been came to her, how near to actual grinding want, how close to the border line that separates stark penury from comfort, it seemed to Margery that their magic was magnified; for she realized how infinitely unselfish must have been the love that could turn them into an ideal childish bliss, how brave the tenderness that guarded her, and prevented her guessing how crude and cruel the reality was. Her instinct and growing powers of observation helped her to interpret them, for Aunt Aggie never spoke of them to the girl, nor did she ever allude to Margery's mother. She had made up her mind that it was best for Margery to forget about her early life altogether, and, rather mistakenly, thought that if those days were never alluded to, they would gradually fade from the girl's memory. But instead, the very silence that was observed about them enshrined them in Margery's soul, and helped to build the temple where she worshipped and brooded over the sweetest memories child ever had, which grew sweeter and more wonderful as she grew to understand more clearly what must have been the love that so transformed them.

That introduction to the house in Curzon Street was typical of the six years that followed. Her aunt remained stiff and tall, not unkind, but unfortunately not kind, bringing up Margery most carefully and properly, but doing it all from a sense of duty, though doing all that sheer hard duty could possibly suggest. If she had been a board of directors and Margery a property about which she had to give annual reports to shareholders, she would infallibly have earned a hearty vote of thanks every year, and been nominated

again to look after their interests. Nor did she intend, by bringing Margery up in this manner, to let her subsequently make her own way in the world. Her French and German and music were nearly as good as Olive's, and Mrs. Morrison was aware that she would have done quite well by the girl if she got her some good place as governess in a thoroughly nice family. That would have been quite a "future" for one whose mother was an obscure and perfectly unimportant actress, but Mrs. Morrison's sense of duty made her plan a far more luxurious future for Margery than that, and she intended that the girl should live with her for the rest of her own life, with an allowance sufficient for her to dress tidily and have a little pocket money of her own, and that she should be surrounded by all the comforts with which Mrs. Morrison surrounded herself. And, on her death, Margery would find that she had left her a sum of money which would enable her to live in suitable obscurity and quiet for the rest of her life. Mrs. Morrison was quite determined to do all this, and yet not repent of her generosity.

Or, again, it was not impossible — it did not seem likely, but it was not impossible — that somebody in a decent station of life might wish to marry Margery. There was the village schoolmaster, for instance, at Ballards, who was quite an educated man and played the organ in church on Sunday with great expression. Should such a man wish to marry her, Mrs. Morrison was resolved, after making all due inquiries as to his thorough respectability, to help Margery here also, to give her a thoroughly nice plain trousseau, and not ever lose sight of her afterward. Olive would probably be married by this time, and Walter out in the

world, and even though Margery's marriage would leave Mrs. Morrison alone and without a companion, she did not intend to make objections or stand in Margery's way. Other people might have a less exalted ideal of duty than she, but she had no intention of lowering her own standard to conform to the less exalted ideals of others.

But — God help the poor lady — in all these arid limitless deserts of duty there was not one drop of the water of love, not one little pool or spring where the wayfarer could quench his thirst. And Margery knew that; Aunt Aggie was the tall, stiff lady still.

It was the same with the others, as it had been on that chilly evening when she arrived at Curzon Street. Olive's lips were still rather hard, but she never forgot that Margery was her first cousin, or that it was kinder never to refer to the dreadful years during which she had lived "in a slum" (for that was how she phrased to herself the words that never passed her lips) with the poor little actress who was her mother. But, above all (and here was immense consolation), Walter had never changed; the genuine boyish welcome of six years ago had not lost its ring. He was still "so glad" to see her.

Mrs. Morrison, as has been mentioned, was accustomed to think it unlikely that any man should want ever to marry Margery, but this conclusion, based upon Margery's general appearance and manner when first she came to Curzon Street, perhaps needed revision nowadays. Certainly a not very clever or perceptive woman might easily have called the pale little sharp-featured girl, who was so silent generally and so unhappy-looking, queer and uninteresting, and

likely to grow up into the type that seems doomed and ordained to spinster-hood; also change easily escapes notice if the changing object is continually under one's eyes, and does not at any time arouse particular interest. But the Margery of to-day was indeed a vastly different being to the Margery of six years back, though a student of physiognomy and growth might have argued well for those sharp little features, those big gray eyes, that mouth so easily given to laughter or tears. It was an impressionable face even then, quick to reflect a moment's mood, and a kindly, tender spirit bred from those enchanted years of childhood directed its expression, so that it was possible that it would not remain always queer and elfin. And it was this thought that somehow occupied Walter that night, when having soundly beaten Margery at billiards he went to his room to smoke, in decent privacy, his first cigarette before going to bed. He, too, for the last six years, had lived with Margery, and though on coming back from school for his holidays he had often noticed that Margery had grown (a fact which Mrs. Morrison was also conscious of, as she paid for her frocks), up till now he had been, except for that, almost as unconscious of change in the girl as his mother had been. But that was not because he looked upon her with an indifferent, and, at heart, a slightly hostile eye, as his mother did, it was because he had always found her the same eager and satisfactory playfellow whose whole soul was set on winning whatever they played at, but whose whole soul recoiled from cheating. Walter had been used somehow, in the girl-despising atmosphere of a public school, where a boy's thoughts do not as a matter of fact lightly turn to thoughts of love, but turn heavily to

the proper pursuits of the place, to think that girls as a class were useless for all purposes, and had no sense of honour, and were prone to pinch and pull hair when causes of war arose. He had had the sense, it is true, to exempt Margery from most of these distressing limitations of her sex, for she did not cheat at games (though keen), and it was not so many years ago that she hit him the most amazing smack in the face for putting Tapioca on to the track of a field-mouse that they had found on the lawn. In consequence his general verdict, given with approbation, had been that Margery was more like a boy than a girl, and he noticed change in her as little as he noticed it in regard to the boys with whom he played, and bathed, and quarrelled at Eton.

But to-day, suddenly and unexpectedly, he had seen her with eyes of other vision than those that had looked on their frank comradeship, and that unknown little impulse of protective tenderness that had come to him that afternoon had occurred and reoccurred in the last few hours. It was quite different from the feeling of taking a friend's part, a thing he had habitually done with Margery, often in the teeth of opposition; it was something that had chivalry at its base. To-night, for instance, at billiards, it had more than once occurred to him purposely to miss some shot that he was practically certain of accomplishing, in order to see Margery win, and eventually he had done so, rather obviously. That had been a dire failure; it gave Margery no pleasure at all. For a moment she did not perceive the intention, and said, "Hurrah, and I didn't even hope you would miss that!" But then she guessed. "Oh, Walter, I believe you did that on purpose," she said. "It isn't any

fun if you do that sort of thing. Please have it again. You must really."

So rather savagely, and vexed at the fiasco, he played again and ran up a colossal break of twenty-three. And Margery had marked them for him with a sigh of relief. "That's all right," she said. "Now I can really play up."

He did not repeat the offence, though at the end, when he had inflicted two really crushing defeats on her, the temptation to say, "I wish you had won one game, anyhow," was strong. It would have been true, too, a very queer state of affairs. And last, most inexplicably of all, he would have liked to kiss her, when she said "Good night." But they had not kissed each other for years, and he could not guess how she would take it. Perhaps on the evening before he went away to Germany, he might find tongue for his request, or, better still, just — just kiss her. They were first cousins after all; it was no outrageous thing. But kinship, as he knew quite well, would be an excuse, not a reason, for such a proceeding.

He had forgotten about the experiment to be tried with a cigarette, and had already half undressed, but the night was hot, and for caution's sake, so that the smell of it should not find its way into the house (for his mother was not admitted into the design), he sat as he was, before the open window, and lit it. It was rather a momentous affair, since it did not concern him alone, but Margery also, for, if he reported well upon it, she was going to have a cigarette with him to-morrow. Her mother, she remembered, used sometimes to smoke on the summer afternoons of those enchanted days in Richmond Park, when rhododendrons flamed, and

old Ogibogi had forgotten to worry them, and the crisp fragrance was entwined in her memory with them. But Walter, who ought, like some pioneer of new countries, to have attended closely to the characteristics of the unexplored land, found his attention wandering, and soon let it wander without heeding the business in which he was engaged at all. To say that he had suddenly fallen in love with Margery, would be an overstatement; but he, healthy and boyish and strong, had awoke to the fact that she was a girl. The sense of sex had been kindled in him, and she from whose fire the spark had come was his playfellow and chum. Perhaps from Mrs. Morrison's point of view, it was as well that the time here was short before he went to Germany.

There were but few days left, a short decade of them, before that event took place, and in external affairs, at all events, the beginning of their passage was not much different from what any ten days toward the end of Walter's holidays had been. The next morning, for instance, was a virago of a day, and a blustering southwest wind drove before it the shed petals of the long border, and exacted a tribute of twigs and needles yet unripe for falling from the cedar. In consequence, as had often happened before, Walter and Margery engaged their energies again at billiards, at the dissipated hour of half-past ten, and since the storm seemed inclined to persevere, defied it and went out in mackintoshes when the morning began to be unbearably long. Wind and rain somehow kindled Margery's always exuberant vitality; there was some sense of adventure to be abroad in hurricanes.

She huddled herself close to Walter, and they left by the garden door, and met the force of the gale.

"Oh, shut it behind you," she said, "or every door in the house will bang, and they will ask where I am. Oh, Walter, isn't the wind ripping? Now we're cut off from everything; everything is miles away. There are oceans of rain and wind between us and everything else. Oh, and the cigarette — you never told me."

The bellowing wind screamed at them, and he had to shout his reply, with mouth close to her ear.

"Where are we going?" he cried. "Down to the farm?"

"Oh, anywhere; what does it matter? Let's go into the woods first."

She took his arm, and they tacked across the lawn, for it was hardly possible to walk in the teeth of the wind, and leaned sideways up against it, till they came to the garden gate that led to the big elm avenue. The great trees were in trouble, for weighted with the full wealth of their summer foliage, the gale beat heavily and solid against them, instead of streaming through their bare branches, as when winter gales vexed them, and the towers of leaf groaned and laboured. Already to leeward of them the ground was strewn with ruin of small branches, and the rooks that inhabited these rocking homesteads were circling uneasily about, or, when the full blast of the gale caught them, were blown impotently down wind, to beat up again with striving pinions and disheveled feathers. Overhead the sky was one texture of uniform gray, veiled by sheets of rain blown almost horizontally out of the southwest, and the wind thundered, as in a sail, from that low dim vault. Even as

they looked, a great branch was torn from one of the elms near them and fell hissing through the air, and crashed and rebounded in broken splinters and *débris* of twigs as it reached the ground.

"Ah, poor thing!" shouted Margery. "What a shame! But the wind is wild; it is mad. It didn't think. Come, Walter."

From here they turned down wind and were blown before it up the steep, slippery glass slope that led into the woods of the park. Here the thicker growth of the trees standing compactly shoulder to shoulder with branches interlaced was a securer bulwark against the force of the wind than the isolated elms of the avenues, and it poured over them like a torrent roaring in the topmost branches, but not getting inside the great house of trees, save in eddies and draughts, and the driven rain no longer beat upon them, but only reached them in droppings from the dense foliaged roof of beeches. The path they had taken led upward, and soon they came to a stretch of open upland, and Margery put over her head again the hood she had thrown back.

"We are divers again, Walter," she said. "We have to dive through the torrent of the wind. Look how the birches bend and buckle. The rain is like clouds of white smoke."

Walter shook a shower of wet from his cap.

"Remarkably wet smoke," he said.

"Yes. Oh, dear, aren't you enjoying it? I just love it." She had pulled back the crimson-lined hood so that it hid her ears and her forehead, and her face only peered out of it. The wind and buffeting of the rain, the struggle against the fighting elements, had flecked her cheeks with lively colour,

and the reflected red from the lining of the hood added a tinge of crimson. And all her face was alive and alert, glorying in the wild riot of the wind. And, again, the new wonder of her struck him.

"You look like one of the — the storm-maidens," he said. "What is their name? In that opera we saw in the summer."

Margery laughed.

"Oh, I would have given anything to be one of the Valkyries!" she said. "Fancy riding in the air on this storm. Hei-yah! Hei-yah! Don't you remember Brunnhilde's cry?"

"Brunnhilde! Yes, that's the one," he said. "And then — who was it? — Wotan put her to sleep on the top of the mountain, with the ring of fire around her, till Siegfried came."

Walter stopped suddenly with words in his brain which he left unspoken. "And then he kissed her and awoke her," was his thought. But Margery clearly was absolutely unconscious of that, for her next words were gloriously unconnected with what was in the boy's mind.

"Yes. I dare say Siegfried was very nice," she said, with scrupulous fairness. "But don't you think everything must have been rather flat after you had been accustomed to ride on the storm? Now we've got to plunge across the open, and get among the fir trees on the other side. They make the nicest noise of all in a wind."

They kept to the woods till they saw below them the farm buildings, and from there made a dash to the shelter of a big haystack, that stood by to leeward of the red brick wall of the kitchen garden, and had a sloping board roof over it.

Here, away from the wind, a corner had been cut out of it, like a slice from a loaf, giving them a shelf to sit down on, with compact fragrant walls to right and left. Outside, close to them, yet as sundered from them as if they looked out from a closed window, the white vapour of the rain drove past in maddened volleys; here they were in a cave built of the ripe June grasses and flowers of the meadow. And then suddenly Margery's mood, which had been so tuned to the storm and the wind, veered completely round. It was no new phenomenon to Walter; that was Margery all over. She would be depressed and dispirited one moment, bubbling with laughter the next, and hotly arguing the third. But this morning it struck him how delicious and how sweetly bewildering were these changes. She was half a dozen people rolled into one; you never knew "which of her" would appear next.

Again she threw back her hood and stretched herself out on the hay, burying her face in it.

"Oh, how good it smells," she said, "and yet it's rather a sad smell. It's the smell of last summer. Oh, Walter, look, there are delicious little bits of dried flowers in it, bits of clover and daisies, and this — this must be meadowsweet. I wonder what we were doing on the morning they cut it all down. You were at Eton, I expect, doing all sorts of nice things. Poor dead flowers and poor dead days."

Here was one of Margery's "rum" thoughts. He tried to get on the track of it, as an intelligent dog tries to understand what his master wants. He was quite successful on this occasion.

"I don't think any days are dead," he said, with rather happy intuition. "At least, no nice days are dead, because they go to make up one's — one's inside, and make one expect good things of the days that are coming. Or is that rot?"

"No, you dear, not a bit," said she. "It's a far more sensible and truer view than mine. The poor dead days tickle, though, don't they?"

She rubbed her nose violently.

"Oh, I'm going to sneeze," she said. "They've gone up my nose."

That was a true view in any case, and a fit of convulsive sneezing seized her. The pepper of the dried flowers and plants affected him also, and for some little time between their laughter and their sneezing, the grave gray haystack trembled with the unusual convulsions. Then by degrees they quieted down, and sat less ensconced, so that a little fresh air took off the pungency of the hay. And, again, Margery's mood veered.

"Well, we ought to have got rid of the poor dead flowers and the poor dead days," she said, wiping her eyes. "Oh, I love laughing, but it leaves one so sad, though crying doesn't leave one merry, which isn't fair. So having got rid of them, let's look forward. Walter, there are only nine days more. I hate your going away. It will be so dull. It's much worse for me, you know, because you have all sorts of nice new things to occupy you, and there's nothing new for me."

"There's Flo," remarked Walter, "and her cushion and brush and comb."

Margery laughed one little, rather soulless cackle, and then was silent.

"Of course, it was angelic of Aunt Aggie," said she at length, "and I love people remembering my birthday. But I don't like Flo, you know; she only wakes up in order to have dinner. I wonder what Aunt Aggie's new dog will be like? I'm sure it will be like Flo in a year or two. You know she doesn't understand dogs a bit. She likes them to lie still and not bark or jump about. I can't help wondering if —— Oh, I am a little beast!"

"Go on, what is it?" asked Walter.

Margery picked a few pieces of grass off Walter's shoulder before she answered.

"It's, it's all this that makes it so beastly that you are going away," she said. "Hasn't it ever struck you that neither Aunt Aggie nor Olive like me? Of course, I don't see a bit why they should, but the fact is that they don't. They never have, you know. And I've done all I could to make them. One does like to be liked, and want to be wanted. At least, I do, though I dare say that's part of my queerness, and they both think I'm queer. I expect it's all my fault that they don't like me, but if only they did! I feel it in my bones; Aunt Aggie didn't give me Flo because she liked me, but because she wanted to get rid of Flo, and it was more convenient to give her to me, than — than — to drown her like the kitten."

"Which wasn't drowned at all," said Walter parenthetically.

"That's another matter. In principle it was drowned. But they don't like me."

Walter was divided between loyalty to his mother and affection for his friend.

"I don't know why you think that," he said. "Mother has done a good bit for you. She needn't have done nearly so much."

"She needn't have done anything," said Margery quickly. "But if I went to Germany, she wouldn't miss me."

Walter puzzled over this a moment. Then an admirably simple thought occurred to him.

"On the other hand, you don't like her," he said.

Margery turned her head slowly toward him, in sheer surprise.

"What?" she said, as if she had not heard.

Walter repeated his remark, commenting:

"I don't think you are quite fair," he said. "Don't you — don't you rather expect everybody to want you, without seeing that it's only just that you should want them? It's only a suggestion, you know. Perhaps it's all rot. But it strikes one rather."

Margery's much quicker mind flashed ahead of him again.

"You mean I'm selfish," she said; "that I only think about myself. But is it selfish to want to be liked?"

"Well, it's not very unselfish," said he, "because it's so awfully pleasant. I suppose we all want to be liked. But to be pals, like — like you and me, we each of us must like the other so — so awfully. At least, I do."

But this perplexing Margery was not thinking about him at all.

"Yes, of course, all that," she said. "But — but am I

selfish? I do like lots of things so much, though one does want them to like one back."

She pondered over this a moment.

"I suppose you're right," she said at length. "You have to do your best to like other people, and leave their liking you to take care of itself. Is that it? But supposing you like somebody very much, and he doesn't like you?"

"Oh, well, that would be rather sad," said he.

He looked at her a moment in silence, with the blood suddenly flushing his smooth face, and Margery, with a sudden impulse, laid her arm round his neck.

"Oh, Walter, you are *the* nicest!" she said. "And there are only nine days more. It's too beastly. Don't let us think about it."

"But please go on liking me after I go to Germany," he said. "Because I shall miss you most awfully, and I should hate thinking you didn't care!"

"I shall cry," said she, with decision. "Floods."

Walter spoke quickly.

"And will you give me a kiss before I go?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, if you like," said she. "I'll give you one now."

She raised her face to his, and kissed him, half laughing. And somehow that was not quite what the unreasonable boy wanted. It meant nothing more than what he had always known, namely, that she liked him very much. And this morning he was not quite content to know that.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS a sunny but cold morning of late October, and Arnold Leveson was, as usual, busy with his work, the nature of which had caused Mrs. Morrison to indulge in certain mild speculations. She had conjectured, it may be remembered, that, since he and his mother were going to Egypt again — the word was Mrs. Leveson's — which implied they had been there before, he was an Egyptologist. That guess was more nearly right than so random and insufficiently founded a surmise had any right to expect to be, for though he was not an Egyptologist, his work was a study of the Greek colonization of the Delta, the rise of Alexandria, and its exotic flowering, carrying on, though the seed was brought by an alien from Macedonia, the matchless bloom of Greek culture. The work, when his studies were complete, was to take the form of a book, profusely illustrated.

The selection of the period was in itself somewhat symptomatic of the leanings and tastes of its investigator; he perhaps cared a little more for things which, though not yet in decay, were a shade past their prime, than for them while they were in the lusty growth of their youth; he liked, at any rate, a very highly civilized epoch, even though it was rather artificial, than the days in which the culture of a nation was making its way toward its appointed perfection. The age of Hadrian, for instance, seemed to him a more attractive epoch than that of Julius Cæsar, the age of Anne

a more delicate and exquisite affair than the breezier spaciousness of Elizabeth. And more especially did he exult in such sophisticated simplicity as that which sparkled in the pages of Theocritus; the real shepherd boys minding their flocks on Attic hills, and minding much more the maiden who tended her kids, were no doubt excellent and simple young people, but he would not have taken a walk to study them on the spot. He preferred that they should be a little crimped and curled, made clean and tidy, and put into poetic setting. When treated thus they seemed to him admirable, though when they were in the natural state they were not more than material to be worked up into graceful and artificial forms. He had none of the instinct of the pioneer; he preferred the beautiful creation of the generation that came after, especially if they preserved an air of freshness and morning, as the civilization of Alexandria certainly did.

Physically, as well as in the appointments of the charming south-facing room in which he worked, he reproduced the fineness and fastidiousness of his mind, which indeed was no dilettante organism, for he was far too delicate a scholar, far too enthusiastic a student to be called dilettante or amateur, except in the sense that he was a true lover of his work. In person he was of average height, but very slenderly built, and his face, no less than his hands, were those of a man sensitive and highly strung. A beard and moustache, light brown, almost of straw-colour, covered the lower part of his face, but his moustache was cut back showing the lines of a very fine and beautiful mouth, and his beard, short and cut to a point, followed without concealing the thin oval of his chin. His eyes, almost womanish in

their softness, looked out from under long and close-lying eyebrows, and his nose, in the real Greek fashion, so common in statues and so rare in life, continued without a break the plane of his forehead. This was high and very white, and hair, slightly curling and of a shade darker than his beard, covered his small and shapely head, but though the first impression of a not very skilled observer might have noted only the finish and slight effeminacy of his face, one more skilled might easily have conjectured that beneath an exterior which at first sight was pretty rather than anything else, it would not be unreasonable to conjecture a considerable tenacity and power. Finished and delicate though the face was, it gave no impression of softness; it might very well be that it was, so to speak, of steel, though it had been so cunningly graven that it appeared as if it must have been of some less stubborn material.

His room reflected him, as do all rooms that are really lived in by their owner, and are not only chambers which he happens to inhabit, with no less accuracy than his face. It was rather low, though of good proportions, and a somewhat sumptuous surface of old Japanese gold paper covered its walls. Low bookcases ran round two sides of it, containing volumes all bound in calf or morocco; it was clear that he liked the materials of his work to be as exquisite as its subject. On the top of these bookcases stood some dozen bronzes, reproductions from the buried loveliness of Herculaneum, and in a glass case near one of the diamond-paned windows were six or seven Tanagra figurines, the paint still lingering on the robes of the slim classical shapes and in their braided hair and palm-leaf fans.

In another window, so that the light came from the left, was the table at which he habitually wrote, a big oblong of dark polished oak of fine Italian workmanship. As a table for work should be, it was of ample area, so that half a dozen books could be ready to his hand, and yet not trespass on the large morocco blotting pad. An onyx tray held his pens, a silver inkstand by Paul Lamerie faced him, and to the right of it was a blue-and-white porcelain saucer containing a few beautiful Greek coins, a tetradrachm of Agrigentum, two of Syracuse, and a couple more with the head of Alexander horned in the manner of Zeus Ammon. These were but a few which he liked to have by him to finger in moments of thought or relaxation; the cabinet with double locks standing by the door contained his very valuable collection.

His taste, however, would not seem to be narrow or over-eclectic. Like all true lovers of beauty, who are not blinded by the fascination of one particular period, and shut their eyes to all else, he believed that there is a kinship among all beautiful things, that makes harmony not discord between them, and his taste, though fastidious, was catholic. Though Greek bronze crowned his bookcases, his chimney-piece had decoration of Dresden figures, standing on each side of a lyre-shaped Louis XVI. clock, while at the two extremities were gilded wooden candlesticks of sixteenth-century Italian work. On a third wall hung two or three Reynolds prints, a twilight Thames-scape by Whistler glowed subduedly on the fourth, and to his mind neither gained nor borrowed beauty from the proximity of a Turner of the second period which hung beside it.

This morning the earliest frost of the year had whitened the grass and blackened the dahlias that stood in the long bed outside his window, and a fire of peat and coals glowed on the basket-grate of the hearth, and lit reflected flames in the old Dutch tiles that flanked it, while Arnold Leveson allowed himself a few moments of leisure, until he finished his cigarette, to warm his hands at the bouquets of flame that fringed the molten core of the fire. Yet this was scarcely in the nature of an indulgence, for the clock on his mantelpiece indicated that it was still a few minutes to half-past ten, the hour at which he, with admirable regularity, sat down to his work. He was, indeed, regular in everything, finding it easier to be punctual than not, and although, as has been said, his work was a labour which he loved, he would, even if in the middle of a sentence, wipe his pen on the tassel of black silk cords that hung from the handle of his writing-table drawer, and rise from his work when the same clock chimed one, in order to take his little walk with his mother in the garden before lunch. In the afternoon he rode, if the weather was fine; but even if its inclemency caused him to stop indoors, he never touched his work again till after tea. From six until the gong for dressing sounded, he was student once more, and at that moment replaced his papers in the drawer, closed his books after putting a marker in each, and went up to his bedroom. On Sunday he never worked at all, less perhaps from Sabbatarian principle than because he believed that six days out of seven was as much work as should be demanded of a brain that wished its output to be nothing less than the best of which it was capable. His regularity, it may be added, was not in the least offen-

sive or blatant; he merely found that such a habit gave excellent results, and that it was simpler to be regular than not.

He had, before he went to warm his hands at the fire, disposed the notebooks and volumes of reference which he was likely to need that morning, so as to be easily accessible to his hand, and when the clock struck there were no more preliminary adjustments to be made. Propped up in front of him was the skeleton of the projected book, divided into chapters, with each chapter already blocked out into the headings of the matter which it should contain. Three chapters of the entire fifteen of which the book, when complete, would consist were already fully written, and reposed in typed manuscript in his drawer, and this morning he was going to begin the fourth, which dealt with the library at Alexandria. The loss of that by burning seemed to him one of the great tragedies in the world's history; he could not think of it without emotion, and it is not beyond the mark to say that he shrank from writing this chapter of his book, as he would shrink from writing a memoir of some dear dead friend. He was student and scholar to the core; beauty and books, and in particular the beauty to be found in books, were his chief access to life.

This morning the hours passed with more than their usual swiftness, and it needed a second glance at the clock, when it struck one, to convince him that the time had come for him to close his work, and go out with his mother into the cool brightness of the October day. She was indeed waiting for him in the hall, and a glance at her showed to whom he owed his delicacy of feature and perhaps of mind. He was an

excellent son to her, considerate and courteous, and ever careful of her comfort, and she valued his very genuine affection as she valued nothing else in this world. There was nothing, it is true, fiery or impulsive about it, but since a man's affections, like his tastes, take their colour from his character, she was not so unreasonable as to expect from him a quality which he was without. Indeed, she scarcely desired that a warmer relation than that very quiet and solid one which existed, should have a place between them. But, mother-like, she would dearly have loved to see him in flame for another; she longed for him to fall in love, to marry. She was proud of his exquisite scholarship, of his power of brilliant and delicate research, but she strongly desired a more human fate for him than his devotion to ancient Alexandria.

"Well, my dear, and how has the morning gone?" she asked.

"Only too quickly. I could scarcely believe it was one o'clock. Has there nothing come for me from the London library? There are some books I ordered which I shall want in a day or two. Have you enough on, mother? It will be a little chilly, and you must not catch cold."

"Oh, we will walk briskly," said she. "Yes, a box came for you during the morning, but I told them not to interrupt you. A note also came from Mrs. Morrison, asking us to dine one day next week."

"Mrs. Morrison?" he asked. "Ah, yes, I remember. She and her daughter called. I do not know that I very much care about dining out. It shortens the hours after tea very much, and we have but a month before we go south."

She laughed.

"My dear, you are like the woman who refused an invitation because it was her last night but fourteen at home. I don't very well see how we can refuse. Mrs. Morrison asks us to name our night. Any night next week apparently will suit her."

"There are certain exhibitions of hospitality that should be considered as unprovoked assaults," said Arnold. "I am not sure that they ought not to be punishable."

"I feel sure she only means to be neighbourly," said his mother.

"No doubt. I only point out that the neighbourliness is of an imperative kind. One can hardly say, 'I will not dine with you ever on any night,' and short of that you have to say which the night will be."

Perhaps at the back of Mrs. Leveson's mind was her constant desire that her son should marry. To do that it was necessary that he should meet eligible girls, and, to her rather sanguine eyes, Olive had appeared to have claims to be considered in that class.

"Indeed, dear, I think that is our only course," she said, "and really an occasional dining-out is quite a good thing for us both when we are in the country. I think it is an excellent piece of discipline. Especially for those who, like us, come into the country for work and quiet, to have to stir themselves occasionally, and be interested in what strangers are interested in."

"Ah, if I may consider it discipline, it is a different matter," he said. "I only rebel at looking upon it as a festal occasion, a treat. But what if Mrs. Morrison is not

interested in anything? She looks as if that might easily be the case with her."

"It is not very likely. I never met any one who was really not interested in anything, though I grant you it may take a long time to find out what it is. I will back myself, dear, to find out what it is she is interested in before you."

"This is the jam with the discipline powder," said he. "Well, I suppose we must go. Will you say how charmed we shall be?"

"Yes, and probably with truth," she said. "Most likely we shall have a very pleasant evening."

"Then say how charmed we expect to be afterward," he suggested, "not how charmed we are. Look how the frost has blackened your favourite bed, mother. Yet I am not sure that the smell of the first frosts of the year does not make up for their slight savageness toward horticulture. There is something so exquisitely clean and austere about it. It smells of nothing at all; that is why it smells so good. It is like a beautiful mind that has neither prejudices nor regrets nor desires."

She smiled.

"I prefer a little more humanity both in minds and in the way the frosts wreck my poor flowers," she said. "Look, there is but a blackened row of heads, where the dahlias were so gorgeous yesterday. It has not spared one; it is a complete slaughter of the innocents."

The ruin of the flowers was certainly thorough, and Arnold, though searching to find consolation for his mother, could see none there. Then an idea struck him.

"The balance is always struck," he said. "Nature is

never unfair. Think of the celery, how the frost which has given blackness to your dahlias, will have given crispness to that."

"I am afraid, dear, you are greedy," said his mother, mourning over her stricken flowers.

"Not in the least; that is a great mistake. A man who has an educated and sensitive palate is no more greedy than the man who appreciates good wine is a drunkard. A greedy fellow eats too much, just as the drunkard drinks too much. But it is only the dullard in the matter of taste who does not appreciate good wine or good food."

"Let us be thankful for the celery, then," said she.

"By all means, and try to forget about the dahlias. But what I say, though you laugh at it, is literally true. Greed is shown with regard to every sense, seeing, hearing, tasting alike, not by the keenness of a man's appreciation, but by his desire for quantity rather than quality. The people who demand an encore for some exquisite song are just as greedy as those who want several helpings of a favourite dish. The people who spend the whole morning in the Royal Academy are as greedy as those who take too much wine."

"But the Royal Academy does not give one indigestion or make one drunk," she said.

"No, dear mother, but it makes one stupid and headachy. Headache is indigestion of the eye, at least that sort of headache is. Just as you ache elsewhere if you eat too much. And the stupidity which it induces is, I should say, very much akin to drunkenness arising from wine of somewhat inferior quality. We had better keep to the gravel, perhaps; are

not your shoes rather thin for the wet grass? We are sheltered from the wind here, also."

Accordingly they turned and retraced their steps down the broad gravel walk which lay below the house.

"It is a common error to confuse the appreciation of things that taste nice with greediness," he said; "and what makes the error more patent is the fact that taste and smell are almost indistinguishable. Yet we are accustomed to consider the woman who buries her face in a bowl of roses and drinks in their rather obvious fragrance, as showing a certain artistic sensibility, whereas we consider the man who loses himself over the fine flavour of an olive as rather gross. Yet to appreciate the flavour of an olive shows a far more delicate sense than to appreciate the smell of a rose. Some day I must make a table to suggest the correlative values of the various senses — taste, smell, hearing, sight, feeling. The taste of roast beef, for instance, would correspond with the smell of asphalt and the sound of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, and the sight of Frith's Derby Day, and the feeling of plush. Perhaps plush is out of tone. Let us substitute the feel of that curious sort of fibre-skeletons of cucumber or something of the kind which you find occasionally in bathrooms. I think you are meant to scratch yourself with them when you have had your bath."

Arnold Leveson spoke very slowly and thoughtfully; he did not rattle out those rather surprising statements with any brilliant air or swift execution. They came, it was clear, not from his lips, but from his brain, and thus had a totally different value. He was not attempting (nor did he ever do so) to make conversation; he only said that which the trend

of the conversation led him to think about. And his mother did not fall into the error of assuming that he was talking nonsense, for the very simple reason that this amiable social gift was not, as far as she knew, among his accomplishments. She might perhaps, on thinking over what he had said, decide that as far as she was concerned, it was nonsense, but she would not even dismiss it as such in her own case, until she had given it her consideration. She was, also, quite sure that these speculations had not been uttered as such. He would no more have talked nonsense on purpose than he would have made a pun.

"I should like to see your tabulated correlation of the senses," she said. "And where does all that is spread in front of us now come? What sound or what taste is there to bring up a corresponding sensation?"

Certainly the question was not easy of answer. In front of them lay a great sweep of declining meadow, emerald of grass, and shimmering under the melted hoar-frost of the night before. To the south lay the beech-wood, gold and russet, and where its shadows still fell on the grass the frost was yet unmelted, and a streak of pearl-white bordered the emerald. Beyond, rising above the tops of the beech trees below them, stretched the broad empty slope of the downs, with the chalk below the grass showing here and there in gashes of silver. Above, the sky was pale unflecked turquoise without flaw.

Arnold Leveson looked at it seriously. The correlative table of the senses was by no means a chance idea; he never uttered a chance idea until he had convinced himself that there was something to be said for it.

"Autumn," he said at length, "and the first frost. But

though winter follows autumn, spring follows winter, and one sees the time when the copse will be yellow with primroses and celandine or blue with wild hyacinth, rather than the death of December. Is it not rather like Walter's first song in the Meistersinger, for which Bechnesser ploughs him? But in his brain is the Preislied. There is the promise of spring in spite of the Bechnesser frost."

This was certainly ingenious, but to Mrs. Leveson's mind it was slightly inhuman. She wished he had taken another simile which occurred to her.

"To me it seems like some young girl," she said, "who is rather repressed, and is made a slave for the time to an icy conventional code. But spring is coming for her."

Arnold gave this his most accurate attention.

"Quite admirable," he said, "but I thought you asked me what correlative position the scene occupied in the realm of sound or taste? I gave you my impression as regards sound. Your young girl has to be sound or taste, you know. She does not quite fulfil your own conditions. The voice of a young girl now: do you mean that?"

Mrs. Leveson was never quite impatient, but she was nearly impatient now.

"I think you are a shade too academic for me," she said. "There is the gong for lunch. Let us go in. I hope they will have sent you in some celery, dear."

Arnold was quite imperturbable.

"You like it too, do you not?" he asked.

This conversation, trivial and superficial though it may be, has been detailed at some length because it was very

characteristic of the mind which was the chief contribution to it. As his mother had said, he was a shade too academic for her; but the accuracy he demanded of others, it is only fair to add, he exacted from himself. He was naturally fond of discussion, and since to the scholar's mind complete accuracy in minutiæ is part of the essential basis of investigation, it was little wonder that he brought with him from his study, so to speak, into the other rooms of the house the meticulous exactitude which his work entailed on him. Yet it would be a misnomer to label him pedant, for in the pedantic mind there is always present the desire to inform others; whereas Arnold was quite free from any such improving intention. But, as he would have been the first to acknowledge, his desire to inform himself was the ruling principle of his life, so warmly pursued as to almost attain the dignity of a passion. And if, as he had himself asserted, Nature always strikes a balance, it may be reasonably supposed that, if, in mixing the cup of his personality, she had put in a somewhat profuse allowance of this spirit of student she had caused the cup not to overflow by granting him a somewhat sparing quantity of the spirit of the humanity that chiefly occupies itself in living and loving, and learns but incidentally. With him the learning came first; the needs of his mind were the first claim upon his attention. And there was no denying the fineness and the beauty of his mind, its exquisite taste, its utter aloofness from anything gross. It sat cool and quiet and apart, testing and observing. Such, at any rate, was the opinion of her who knew him best, and if some spiritual analyst had brought her a report framed on such lines as these of her son, she would

willingly have signed the declaration that to the best of her knowledge the account was, on the current date, a correct one.

The dinner party which Mrs. Morrison proceeded to arrange round the newcomers, as soon as she got Mrs. Leveson's "charmed" reply, was in most respects like all other country dinner parties when a dozen or so of people are collected from about the same number of miles of adjacent country to meet and eat at one table, without any strong reason for being brought together, whereas, had they followed their private inclinations they would have let their motors and carriages repose in the coach-houses and have eaten at their own tables. But to-night was something of an occasion, since the object of the party was that the neighbourhood might meet in more intimate and longer conversation than is incident to card-leaving the newcomers to the district, and Mrs. Morrison had but few refusals. Indeed, the only *contretemps* before the evening arrived was that on the very morning of the day of the gathering the clergyman's wife was suddenly stricken with influenza, and Mrs. Morrison was a lady short. That, however, in her very conveniently composed household was easily remedied, since it was perfectly simple for Margery to dine downstairs, instead of having her supper in the schoolroom with Flo snoring on her cushion by the fire. She had a slight cold, it is true, which was the actual determining factor in her dining upstairs instead of down, but her fate was generally kept in abeyance like this, so that, had it been settled that she should dine downstairs, and a man had been visited with a sudden affliction like Mrs. Sawyer's, Margery, whether

she had a cold or not, would have dined upstairs. The incident seemed trivial enough at the time, and Nature, who invariably carries out what she means to do, would certainly have thought of some other plan of securing the meeting which was necessary to her design, but, as it was, Mrs. Sawyer's sudden influenza saved her the trouble of making any further arrangements. It also gave Mrs. Morrison an opportunity to say to herself that it would be a treat for Margery to dine downstairs and hear so much amusing conversation.

Margery's cold, as has been said, was but slight, and it did not in the least turn her into a puffy and blear-eyed caricature of herself. Instead, it merely gave a certain added moistness and softness to her eyes, a little heightened colour—she had sat over the fire for a good deal of the afternoon—to her face, which was far from unbecoming, and the opportunity to wear a light blue silk shawl over her shoulders. It had not seemed a very charming opportunity to the girl, but, in spite of her opinion that it looked frumpy, her aunt insisted on it, saying that it was better to be sensible and not make a cold worse than to care how she looked. Margery, however, was completely in error about the frumpiness; the shawl draped into charming lines, and was exactly of the same shade as the blue ribands of her white muslin.

She fell to the lot of the youngest man present, but as this was Harry Morland, a friend of Walter's who had left Eton the same term as he, and been put firmly on a stool in his father's office in the City, she was quite content with her lot. They had both heard from the exile in Germany within the last week, and there was plenty to talk about, and their

chatter and laughter over Walter's wail gave an earlier vivacity to dinner than it might otherwise have enjoyed, for country parties of this nature seldom get going till fish has gone. But Walter's news started the two off at once.

"My letter was chiefly about food," said Harry; "he says you have jam with everything; plum jam in the soup, gooseberry jam with veal, and cherry jam with chicken."

"Mine was about baths and windows," said she; "he says the former are rare and the latter are shut."

Arnold, who had taken in Olive Morrison, and was seated just opposite, heard this. He had got no further at present than to assure Olive that their drive had not been cold because they had plenty of rugs, and to ascertain that Olive did not hunt, had never been to Egypt, and liked dogs pretty well. She was just going to ask him if he took any interest in the Suffragette question, on which she had several prepared remarks to the effect that if women were going to get the vote they would not get it that way, and that it was too bad to interrupt Cabinet Ministers at their meetings, when the laughter over poor Walter's Teutonic tribulations made him look up. He had not seen Margery before, for she had sequestered herself in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Morrison, thinking it was not good for a mere girl to be brought forward too much, had not introduced her to Mrs. Leveson or her son.

"How enchanting fragments of conversation are which have no context," he said to Olive. "Baths are rare and windows shut. One ought never to inquire the context: such remarks are like bones of unknown animals brought from remote countries."

"Yes?" said Olive, who was not very quick. "I expect they are talking about my brother Walter, who has gone to Dresden."

"Ah, you have given me the species and habitat of my mysterious animal," said he. "Who is that girl opposite? Let me know all about it now."

"Oh, that is my cousin Margery," said Olive. "She lives with us."

He was still looking at her, admiring the delicious gaiety and enjoyment of her face, but admiring almost more the folds of the shawl she wore. It came close over her shoulders, leaving her slender neck bare. She had wrapped one hand in it, and it reminded him of the gracious simplicity of one of his Tanagra statuettes, that of a young girl seated on a rock. There was a touch, and more than a touch, of something really Greek about this cousin of Miss Morrison's. Her head was small, her hair came low over her forehead, and it was set on her head with that lissom though upright poise so characteristic of Greek work. English women, as a rule, to his mind looked as if they had stiff necks. Margery happened to look up at the same moment, and for an instant their eyes met. Then he turned to Olive again.

"She lives with you?" he asked. "That must be delightful for you and her alike. The English are usually so uncousinly about their cousins; there is no sense of clanship. You get it in Scotland, and you get it again in Italy, where in old days, at any rate, a family house was a family house, and the father and mother lived on one floor, the eldest son with his wife and family on another, and as

likely as not a married daughter on the third. But I suppose propinquity has its disadvantages as well."

Olive had been more than once told by her mother that what men liked was not that a girl should tell them her views about anything, but should take an interest in what they were saying. So she asked if that was the case in Egypt also. This was not a conspicuous success, for he had nothing more to say, except that, as far as he was aware, it was not the case, and then fell that first momentary pause, and both wondered what to say next. He thought first.

"There are but few things in the world I quarrel with," he said, "but the English winter is one. My mother and I always try to get off before the end of November."

"That must be very pleasant," said Olive. "I suppose it is quite hot in Egypt all the time? We are always here till after Christmas, and go to town in January."

"I fail to see why any one goes to London at all if they can avoid it," he said.

"Are you not fond of the theatre?" she asked. "We go a great deal in London, and to concerts. Are you fond of music?"

Arnold was suddenly filled with a mild exasperation at these idiotic questions. She was quite capable of asking him if he was fond of reading. But it was his duty to make himself as agreeable as he could manage, and he detached a strand from this general question, and said something about Strauss. Olive, however, by the interest she showed in Strauss, firmly and finally and unintentionally rendered any further discussion on the point difficult.

"We went to several concerts at the Queen's Hall last

year," she said, "where they did pieces by Strauss, but it was very hard to grasp them. Do you not find it hard to grasp them? There is very little tune in them, I think. Have you seen 'Salome'? It was being done in Paris when I was there last year, but my mother did not want to go. But we saw the Salome dance at the Palace."

But by ill-luck Arnold had not seen that, and in consequence Olive could not show interest in what he thought of it. In fact, the subject seemed to be heading back to theatre again, but she dexterously tweaked it away, and said that if he was going to Egypt he would miss the season of English opera in January and February. Did he care about opera? She had noticed also that at present he had eaten no meat. "Are you a vegetarian?" therefore was a question that might prove of interest later. But this promising topic was instantly snatched away from her, for at the moment he took venison. But, still, venison led to Scotland. That would come after opera. There was no opera in Scotland. At least she thought not. Inquiry, however, could be made on this point.

It was about at this moment that Mrs. Morrison glanced round the table, and, at the sight, the satisfaction of a hostess spread over her face. She had literally not had time to survey her guests before, so continuous had been her conversation with Sir Richard Fortescue, who sat on her right and was full, figuratively speaking, of the Territorial Army.

Every one else was talking, too, that was the great point, and it was not her business to find out whether they were interested or not in their various conversations. As long as they ate and talked, she need concern herself no further.

But it was time to shift the contents, and as Sir Richard was at this moment employed on a second helping of venison, she could easily turn to her neighbour on the left, and remark for the second time that evening that there had been six degrees of frost the night before, and it seemed just as cold to-night if not colder. But there was so much damp in the air, one always felt cold more if it was damp. This observation, as she had hoped it would do, led to a panegyric about the delights of Switzerland in winter, and she had leisure to observe whether her changing of the flow of conversation had been obeyed.

Yes: so far so good. Mr. Leveson was duly inclined toward his right instead of toward Olive, but somewhere opposite them in a place she could not see without leaning forward, there was a break. Simultaneously she heard two young laughs, and divined at once that Margery was still talking to Harry Morland. But Margery had no manners; she owed her want of them to her unfortunate parentage. Happily, however, she herself was opposite Olive, and by catching Olive's eye and then looking smartly to the left, she might be able to indicate what Margery was guilty of. So Olive, understanding the signal, for she had already observed that Margery was continuing to talk "wrong," fixed her pensive gaze on that young lady, till Margery looked up. Then she held Margery's eye, and directed her own away from Mr. Morland to her desert-island neighbour. And so by a little tact, the wheels were set spinning again.

Mrs. Morrison, though she always provided her guests with an excellent dinner, was not in the drawing-room after-

ward quite so good a *chef* with regard to entertaining there, as was the one who had provided for the dining-room. She was not a card-player herself, and held that bridge killed conversation, but she had a card-table laid out in the second drawing-room, where stood a shut Bechstein grand, and, when the gentlemen came in after their cigarettes, said in a chilling tone, "I don't know if anybody cares to play bridge?" That was literally true, and since she took no steps whatever to find out, nothing happened. The ladies, who had been sitting in a loose kind of circle, each edged a little further away from each other, men inserted themselves into the holes, and they all began to talk in couples again. Thus securely arranged, no power short of an earthquake or the announcement of carriages, as a rule, could get them re-sorted again: they were a Stonehenge of stability.

Arnold Leveson had entered almost last of the men, and there were but two or three manholes left unoccupied. He went to the nearest, which was next Margery. She had evidently been expecting her friend Harry to take this place but she smiled a welcome to the other. Instantly Mrs. Morrison swooped down; if Mr. Leveson was going to talk to Margery she must be introduced. It was like Margery to appear capable even of talking to anybody, to whom she had not been formally made known.

"And now we are all right," said Arnold. "Please tell me more about your cousin Walter."

Margery's eye brightened.

"Oh, do you know Walter?" she said.

"No; I only know he finds baths rare and windows shut, and is learning German in Dresden."

Margery laughed, tilting her head a little back with exactly the gesture of the Tanagra figure.

"I must have been talking far too loud then," she said. "I'm sure you heard me say that at dinner."

"I don't deny it. It made me laugh, which is always a good thing."

"Yes; except when it is particularly important to be grave. I want to laugh most then."

"Of course; trying to be grave is the most humorous thing there is. It isn't fair, is it, that some people should be grave naturally, without trying?"

Margery considered this.

"I don't know," she said. "I expect people who are gay without trying have the best time. Think of dogs and cats. Dogs are so much the happier."

His habitual accuracy cropped up here.

"I think I disagree," he said. "Cats have so many mysteries and secrets. That must be so enchanting for them. A piece of paper on the end of a string is only a piece of paper on the end of a string for a dog, but for a cat it is something dangerous and weird that has to be stalked from behind the legs of chairs and other hiding-places. Or it grows dusk, and a dog simply goes to sleep. But that is a magical hour for cats. The room they really know quite well becomes a jungle or a primeval forest. They make wild scurries across the hearth-rug, they hide behind curtains, and peer at one with faces of excitement and rapture. And then, alas, for the broken-windedness of illusions, they become suddenly bored with their own inventions, walk quite slowly to the middle of the room, put up a hind-

leg, like a flagstaff, and devote their staid and middle-aged attentions to licking their tails."

Margery leaned forward in her chair, looking very young and very much alive.

"Oh, it's lovely!" she said. "Do go on!"

It was not long before their carriage was announced, for they had a long drive before them, and Arnold had insisted on ordering it early, thinking that he would certainly have had enough of the evening. But as a matter of fact, he was quite sorry to go, for Margery with her fresh eager interest was like a cool breeze in a hot room. He did not, as a matter of fact, care very much for cats, though he had observed them with a very accurate eye. Certainly the evening, taken as a whole, had not been completely a waste of time.

The night was chilly, and he pulled the window up as they started.

"What curious contrasts one sees," he said to his mother. "That girl I talked to after dinner was so marvelously different from any one else there. She happened to be alive, authentic. She will be wonderfully beautiful, too. Dear me, how young it makes one feel while one is talking to a girl, and how dreadfully old when one ceases."

"My dear, whether you feel dreadfully old or not, you are certainly young yet," said his mother.

He laughed.

"She would not agree with you," he said. "I should like to hear her talk me over with that boy who sat next her at dinner. 'What a dear old thing!'" she probably said.

Mrs. Leveson's maternal plans for her son were never wholly absent from her mind. She certainly wished that

Margery had been rather older, but it was something that Arnold should appear to take the slightest interest in any girl. And then this little encouragement was suddenly damped.

"She is like a Tanagra figure," he said, "of the best period."

At this she lost patience a moment.

"Ah, Arnold, if you would only think that your Tanagra figures are like girls, instead of the other way round," she permitted herself to say.

That was a mistake. She could not direct his likes by the expression of a wish. He was silent a moment.

"Dear mother," he said at length, "you must put up with me. Some men are born to be husbands and fathers. I am really a freak of nature, I suppose. I like my studies so much better than anything else. I think, for an exception, I will do an hour's work before I go to bed. I got to a really critical point this evening, when I had to go and dress."

Yet the fact that he had even alluded to the existence of the great class of husbands and fathers (and that, too, in a kind of apology for not belonging to them) was something. She did not know that after he had gone to his study that night, he took out the Tanagra in question, and confirmed its likeness to Margery. That, had she known it, would have been something more.

CHAPTER IV

MARGERY — a very different Margery from the one presented now more than two years ago on the night of Mrs. Morrison's dinner party, was seated by the fire in the room that had been the schoolroom in those days at Ballards, and had now, chiefly because nobody else wanted it, come to be known as Margery's room, reading and meditating over and again reading the letter she had just received. Every now and then her mouth lengthened and uncurled into a smile, but the smile was never of long duration, and those delicately finished ends of her lips drooped again downward in a kind of childish regret and appeal. Her eyes, too, were in similar April mood, sometimes they brightened with a tender gaiety, but the prevailing expression was, like that of her mouth, partly appealing, partly sad. But they never froze; they were never other than kind; April, it would appear, was beyond the reach of frost. Rain might threaten, weather cloudy or weeping might threaten, but there was no hint of a spell of winter to follow. May and June—though in what fashion it was not clear—were the inevitable sequence of the months.

It was April, too, in the external procession of the seasons — an April that corresponded very well with the more intimate affairs that concerned her, and, as usual, Mrs. Morrison had left London to spend a week or two in the country, before a season of special efforts began. Never, in these

matters of wind and weather, had there been a more deliciously inconstant month, except that, as in the case of Margery herself, there had been no hint of frost. But dear April had done everything else possible; there had been great gales (and for that matter there was one trumpeting and bugling now); there had been days of still gray skies and gently descending rain. There had been days of heavenly cool brightness, and days that had been borrowed even from the very heart and soul of midsummer. Nobody could tell (least of all apparently the professional weather prophets) what was going to happen next, and the growth of springtime had been almost equally puzzled. Daffodils shot up bravely in the shady places of the woods, and their bravery was rewarded by being incontinently pelted to bits by violent showers. And yet those same showers only caused fresh buds to rear their bold sheaths above the ground and press forward with growth of sappy stem, pregnant and enlarged. The wood anemones fared no less uncertainly; it was only the tight, hardy, little squibs of hawthorn bud which were indifferent to these variable moods of the weather. They were impervious to shower, varnished and watertight, partaking perhaps a little of the nature of the parent stem which bred thorns as easily as flowers or leaf. But the daffodils had no kinship with thorny things. No more had Margery; her aunt, it may be remembered, was no blood relation.

She was seated by the fire; and in one of those emotional pauses—nobody can sustain an emotion of any sort by itself for many minutes—which always interrupt the thread of any train of thought, however closely it concerns the

thinker, she wondered why there was a fire, for the evening was quite warm, and the only clear result from the fact of the fire was that occasional puffs of smoke were shot into the room when some more than usually violent blast passed overhead. Then she remembered that she had lit it herself from sheer mechanical movement, suggested by the fact that it was laid ready for lighting. In the same way she had several times in this last half-hour risen from her chair and paced up and down the room, for no reason except that there was an empty space to walk about in.

And then suddenly she spoke aloud in a sort of wail.

"Oh, and he *is* such a darling, too," she said.

It was the beloved Walter who was the darling; it was his letter, received two days before, that was still being read and reread by her. And the beloved Walter was expected home this very evening. Yet Margery's voice wailed as she spoke of him.

For the most part of these last two and a half years he had been abroad, learning his languages, and now critical affairs were on hand. He came home now to go in for his Foreign Office examination in a month's time, and in the interval before that he was to celebrate his coming of age. That was no small affair; no question of a gold watch from the servants and a hundred pounds from his mother. He stepped, on the last day of April, into a huge property, and there was going to be a dance and an address from tenants and an immense presentation. And all the time he was thinking, so this letter showed Margery, not of the examination at all, nor of the festivities in his honour. He was thinking of her. He wondered if she knew how much. She

did. And the worst of it was that he wrote in such gloriously high spirits.

Margery looked helplessly round the room. It was full of things that connected her and Walter. There was the stuffed remains of all that was mortal of Tapioca, in a glass case, with a brilliant sunset painted on the back of it, and some curious artificial grasses growing round her. Apparently it was the hour at which, as Mr. Leveson had said in a conversation she remembered, though it was more than two years old, when cats turn the dusk to magic. . . . Lying on a cushion before the fire was Tapioca's kitten, whose death she had prematurely bewailed, and whom Walter, by a peremptory visit to the stable-yard, had saved from the bucket, and who, having passed the stage of kittenhood, was going shortly to have kittens herself. The cushion on which she at this moment was lying had been Flo's. Flo, however, had passed through the gate of apoplexy into another life, in which regeneration it was to be hoped she would regain her figure and youth.

Indeed, the room was full of herself and Walter. There was a table they had made, by their own unaided efforts, the Christmas after he had first gone to Germany, when a week of influenza had kept them house-bound. It had four legs, no less, though it stood on only three, and was coloured a rich brown by the application of Condy's fluid, which they were bidden to gargle with, but which had found a more artistic fulfilment of itself in table-staining. He—unchivalrously—had said he had caught influenza from her, she—offended—had said she caught it from him, and it was like a boy. In the end they had agreed to conclude

that they had invented it between them, though Mrs. Morrison never ceased to think it was Margery's fault. Then there was a portrait of Walter, rather vague, which Margery had painted, the frame of which he had carpentered. It had never been quite decisively established whether she had given him the picture or he had given her the frame. So they had signed it together, "Margery-Walter from each other."

There were photographs of him, too, taken by her, and of her taken by him, and photographs of them both taken by Olive. These were chiefly ridiculous—Margery, by herself, was jumping over the lawn-tennis net; he, alone, was doing crochet, with large hands and a puckered brow. Or, when they appeared together, he was dressed as a huge girl, and she—this was a charade photograph—was on her knees proposing to him. Everything told of silly, unthinking laughter, but now, to her, an irony had entered. It did not spoil these dear relics; they were far too wholesome in themselves to have the possibility of turning sour come near them, but they had become relics; they no longer represented that which was. They were concerned with that which had been.

His letter admitted of no chance of misconstruction. Often and often he had said, "It will be ripping to see you again," and resoundingly had Margery echoed her response. But now he said, "All I really look forward to is seeing you." And that wish, which he enlarged upon to the extent of these six pages of writing, found no echo of any sort in her heart. She heard it, she knew what it meant. But here there was no "Oh, Walter," in reply. There was the wail instead, "And he *is* such a darling."

That was the excruciating pity of it. If she had not cared for him so much, it would not be so wounding. But she cared for him very much, only not like that. She cared for nobody like that—quite. And yet even if she had not cared at all she would have hated the idea of his suffering. It was so mixed . . . it was delightful if other people cared for you, but the delight of all delights was to care for them. That was a larger outlook than had been hers two years ago; the knowledge that to care for others was the important thing, that and to leave their caring for you to look after itself. And that idea had been given her by Walter. He had said that, or something that necessarily blossomed into that, one howling day when they sat in a gash of a haystack down at the farm. Indeed, she owed Walter so much; it was not beyond the mark to say that most of the happiness of her childhood had been derived from him.

Her rather rueful meditations were interrupted by the entry of her aunt. It was quite an unusual occurrence for her to come up to Margery's room, since, if she wanted to see her, she generally sent for her. Even that did not happen very often. It was clear, then, that she had something rather particular to say, and though she did not seem able to approach any subject which could account for her coming up to the third story, at once Margery felt sure that something was coming.

Aunt Aggie looked round the room appreciatively. It was, as a matter of fact, rather bare, and the furniture was old.

"It really is very nice for you to have this great room all

to yourself, Margery," she said, "and I am sure, if the house is very full for Walter's coming of age, you will not mind it being used as a bedroom."

"Of course not, Aunt Aggie," said she. "I will clear some of my things away."

"No, there is no need. I can easily say, if I want to put anybody in it, that it is the old schoolroom. Dear me, you have a piano here, too, and there is Flo's cushion. You can practise here all day and disturb nobody. That must be the piano that was given me on my marriage. It was always considered a very good one, and the good ones mellow with age so wonderfully."

Some half of the notes in this mellow piano happened to be dumb, and the rest were so out of tune that scales had a curious Oriental effect about them; the intervals were not known intervals.

"And such comfortable chairs," continued Aunt Aggie, seating herself in one with a good deal of horsehair protruding in a tuft from the seat, "where you can sit by the fire and read. I'm sure I have not had a fire for more than a week in my room."

"I know; it was careless of me," said Margery. "I lit it without thinking. One does not want a fire on such a day."

"Pray do not think I grudge it," said Aunt Aggie generously. "You may have a fire whenever you like, without asking me. Ah, I see you have a letter from Walter there. He will be here in an hour now. What news does he give you? I have not heard from him for a fortnight."

"Oh, not much," said Margery, gathering up the closely

written sheets. "I think I told you all the news. It is several days old; I was only reading it again."

Apparently Aunt Aggie, though she was seated in the so comfortable chair by the fire, was a little restless, and, getting up, began walking about the room. In a certain stolid way she was rather observant, and, her steps taking her to the table in the middle of the room, she took up a book that lay there.

"Dear me, what a handsome binding," she said. "Is it one of the books from the library? Be sure you put it back, Margery. A set can so easily be spoiled by losing one of the volumes. 'The History of Alexandria,' by—by whom?"

Margery made a little quick movement in her chair.

"It is by Mr. Leveson," she said. "It is just out. He very kindly sent it to me."

Mrs. Morrison opened it. On the title page was an inscription that positively horrified her, and she read it out. "For Margery Morrison, from her antique friend the author," she said in a withering voice. Then in a voice even more withering, a voice that would have blasted a sapling oak, she added, "What does this mean, Margery? Tell me all about it at once. You have, of course, no business to receive presents from anybody without my knowing about it. It's most improper, most indelicate."

"I am sorry you think that," said the girl quietly. "There is nothing to tell you about it. He merely sent it me."

"'Antique friend,'" said Mrs. Morrison, "implies a degree of intimacy."

Margery smiled.

"Dear Aunt Aggie, do you think so?" she said. "It

really was only a joke. I will tell you. He dined here — oh, ages ago, the first time I saw him, and afterward he asked me if I had not talked him over with Harry Morland, and did not we agree that he was a nice old thing? That is absolutely all."

"And has he written to you?" demanded Aunt Aggie. "And you to him?"

"Yes. I have had several letters from him," said Margery. "I answered them, of course."

Now this was in the nature of a thunderclap to Mrs. Morrison. Since the unsuccessful pursuit of a baronet some years ago on behalf of Olive, she had settled in her own mind that the man designed for her daughter was this fickle (that was the epithet she mentally applied to him) Mr. Leveson. He was in every way a suitable match, wealthy, and of good family, and as she had made up her mind that he was going to propose to (and be accepted by, for she would see to that) Olive, that pleasant familiarity which had existed between the two houses during the autumn and winter — for this year the Levesons had not gone south — bore the most promising interpretation. "Instead of which," thought Mrs. Morrison now, "he goes about sending books and letters to Margery."

This discovery, so providentially made, had the effect of turning her mind for the present off what she had come to say to Margery, for the girl's conjecture as to that had been quite correct. But she could return to that afterward.

"I am astonished at you, Margery," she said, "but I intend to try to believe that you have been acting in ignorance."

"In ignorance of what, Aunt Aggie?" asked Margery.

"You should not pick my words up like that. In ignorance. I hardly know what to say to you. Of course this clandestine correspondence must at once cease, and you must bear in mind that it means nothing more than that you were a little girl to whom he was being kind. If you have been stuffing your mind with silly false hopes ——"

Margery flushed.

"Aunt Aggie," she said quickly, "I think you are assuming a good deal. Mr. Leveson has been very nice to me, and I like him immensely. I have not been stuffing my mind with anything. I ——"

And at that moment Margery stopped abruptly. It was true that she had not been "stuffing her mind," as her aunt elegantly put it, with any silly false hopes, but even as she disclaimed that, it struck her very suddenly and completely how full her mind was of thoughts about him. Ever since that day when first she had met him, hardly a day had passed on which he had not been present, more or less vividly, to her mind. Even as her eye had been struck at once by the fineness of his delicate face and the deftness of his hands, so her mind had been captivated by the fineness and delicacy of his. She in her girlhood and on that very subordinate plane on which she moved in her aunt's house had had little opportunity of mixing much with the world, and indeed such section of it as came to Ballards or Curzon Street contained nothing resembling this type of the cultivated yet not bookish student, and her curiosity had been at once aroused, while such little satisfaction as was granted it seemed but to whet its appetite. And yet curiosity very soon ceased to be a word in the least applicable to her attitude; curiosity soon passed

into a sort of undefined but none the less genuine adoration, of the kind that a girl of healthiest body and mind can have for a man a decade and a half older than herself. Such a feeling had grown very quickly; half a dozen meetings had sufficed to produce it, and there apparently it had stayed, mature but barren of further offshoots. She was thus quite truthful in saying that she had not been stuffing her mind with hopes; it is now also probably intelligible why, having said that, she felt herself unable to go on, to give her aunt any further reassurance on the subject. Also she resented, though she tried to stifle her resentment, this sudden incursion on Aunt Aggie's part into her own private and secret affairs—affairs which were almost secret from herself. She knew that she had certain feelings about Arnold Leveson, but she felt them, as it were, only striving softly below the surface of her conscious mind, and she did not even allow herself to pry into them. It was, therefore, just a shade outrageous that Aunt Aggie should come with her spade and pickaxe like this.

"I see you hesitate," said Aunt Aggie, "and I will do you the justice, Margery, to say that I believe your hesitation is due to a very natural feeling of shame, now I point out to you what the real state of things is. It is from ignorance, as I was saying when you interrupted me, that you have been allowing yourself to act and feel as you have been doing. I am glad to be able to put that interpretation on it, and to feel that you now see how indelicate it is for a girl like yourself to be putting herself forward."

Margery could not allow this to pass; a flame of wholly reasonable anger made her hot.

"You are putting a wrong interpretation on everything," she said quickly. "I am not ashamed of myself, because I have done nothing to be ashamed of, nor have I thought anything of which I am ashamed. I have not put myself forward——"

"You must allow those who are older than you, and have more experience of the world, to judge of that," said Mrs. Morrison.

"Then why have you not warned me, and told me I was doing so?" said the girl.

Mrs. Morrison pointed to the fatal volume.

"Because I was not aware that you were receiving presents from a man," she said, as if that last dreadful word was the equivalent of a poisonous serpent. "It is clear that you must have encouraged him—not that it means anything to him, for as I say you must only regard him as having been kind to a mere child—or he would not have written to you and given you presents. He doesn't send presents to Olive and me."

That was bitterly true; she wished very much that he did send presents to Olive, and the truth of it soured her further.

"I will say nothing about your conduct toward me," she went on, "in the lack of gratitude with which you have met all that I have done for you for years ever since I brought you to live with me, and treated you as my own daughter. We will leave all that out."

Margery ceased at this moment to rebel under the unfairness and unkindness of Aunt Aggie, simply because she could not help being amused almost to the point of giggling at the glorious wildness of those random accusations. For

some reason Aunt Aggie wished to lay it on thick and hot, and, slave to that imperious desire, she did not care what she said. Had her accusation been founded on anything, it would have been different; as it was, it was as if she accused her of stealing the regalia. So that thrice-blessed sense of humour which makes more than tolerable situations which would without it be hard to bear with equanimity, and extracts from them an unexpected and fearful joy, buttered, so to speak, the crust of indignation, making it quite soft and palatable.

Mrs. Morrison's remarks may appear to the reader to be merely brutal and indefensible, but the judgment would be a harsh one. There were mitigating circumstances. In the first place the fickle Arnold had at least allowed himself to become aware of Margery's existence, and Mrs. Morrison was vexed that he should have granted himself this indulgence. She did not want him to be aware of anybody's existence except Olive's, and though she told herself sensibly enough that the interchange of a letter or two, and the gift of a book on ancient Alexandria (which looked, as she glanced through a page or two of it, remarkably dry and historical) did not suggest any immediate declaration of devotion, it was tiresome that Margery's existence should be even known to him at all, except perhaps as the tall girl with rather untidy hair, who may have given him his cup of tea. And in the second place, the poor lady felt she wanted either a little moral indignation, or in any case a sense of Margery's immense indebtedness to her, to support her (like the nip of some spiritual stimulant) through that which she had really come up here to say. She had begun, it may be

remembered, by some useful reflections on the comfort and convenience of the room, by the indulgence with regard to fires and now, having almost persuaded herself that Margery had behaved very forwardly in letting her existence be known to the fickle archæologist, she felt strengthened to proceed.

She returned to her seat with the book on Alexandria in her hands, and feeling now sufficiently ill-used to retaliate on the cause of her discomfort.

"We will leave out all that, I repeat," she said, with emphasis, "because I am not thinking of myself at all, but only of you. I do not want you to get ridiculous notions into your head (this was a brilliant idea) and then have to suffer disappointment and reaction. So I warn you about Mr. Leveson. And since we are on the subject there is another warning that I can give you, which may be useful."

At this point Margery guessed what this second warning would be, and the temptation to take the wind out of her aunt's sails was irresistible. Also there lurked in her appreciation of the humorous side of this interview, the appreciation of its gross injustice.

"Oh, I think I know, Aunt Aggie," she said. "Do you not want to warn me of the meaninglessness of any attention that Walter may show me? You need not trouble."

Mrs. Morrison gave a sharp glance at her niece, rather like a peck of the eyes.

"You put it very coarsely, Margery," she said, "but since——"

Margery shook her head; this also could not pass without some little protest.

"No, I don't put it coarsely, Aunt Aggie," she said. "I only put it plainly. Please, did you not mean that?"

Aunt Aggie felt there was no use is not taking advantage of the opening that Margery had herself given.

"If you will allow me to put it in my own words," she said, "I think you will be able to gather what I do mean. You and Walter, ever since I took you away from the want and misery which surrounded you, have been great friends, playing together and having your joint pursuits. But you must remember that he and you are both growing up, and your childish intimacy must come to an end."

Margery remembered her own meditations about this. "It has come to an end, Aunt Aggie," she said quietly.

"I am very pleased to hear it, and I take your word for it, though I observe he still writes to you. Not that I wish to know what he says, far from it. If you were to spread his letter before my eyes, and ask me to read it, I should instantly avert them," said Mrs. Morrison. "No, I trust I have no curiosity for confidences that are not willingly given me."

In spite of this assurance, Margery did not instantly unfold Walter's letter before her aunt's eyes, in the certainty of seeing them instantly averted. Instead, she waited to hear what was coming next. Her aunt seemed quite determined to put her in the wrong, and since that was her desire, Margery resigned herself to be put wherever she chose.

Mrs. Morrison closed her eyes and spoke with great feeling.

"Walter is my only son," she announced, and waited for this incredible news to sink in. "He is my only son, and

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next week he comes of age, and will step into the property of which I have been a steward during his minority. I leave my future to him, for apart from the little jointure that is secured to me in any case, I have no legal claim on him whatever. But I trust Walter, and, as I say, leave my future in his hands entirely. And as for you, Margery, I can only say that, however narrow my means may be, there will always be sufficient for you and Olive and me, though it will not be of the luxurious description to which you have been accustomed since you were rescued by me and brought here. You may perhaps wonder why I say this (Margery did) and to what it leads. It is to this: that Walter steps into quite a different position from that which he has hitherto occupied. We are all (except for my little jointure) dependent on him. He may wish to shut Ballards up, or let it, in which case we must cheerfully go to some far humbler place, for though the house in Curzon Street is mine, it costs a very great deal to keep up. You would scarcely believe what rates and taxes are!"

Mrs. Morrison then seemed to recollect that though Margery might have wondered what all this led to, she had not yet gratified her curiosity, and without further preamble came to the point.

"Walter will be a very rich man," she said, "and it is my hope that he will marry suitably. In any case, any childish intimacy which may have existed between him and any one else must come to an end. Young men, especially Walter, are very kind-hearted, and very easily led into entanglements. We must all — all, I say — do our best to clear any possible entanglements from his path."

Margery got up and stood in front of the fire facing her aunt.

"I think I understand," she said. "You allude to me as a possible entanglement for Walter?"

There was really nothing to do but to say "Yes." Aunt Aggie said it.

"But, then, about Mr. Leveson," continued Margery. "Are you warning me against the impossibility of my marrying him also? Do let's have it plainly, Aunt Aggie. It is so much better when a thing is being talked out to talk it completely out, and leave no possible place for misunderstanding."

"I regard your marrying either of them as a total impossibility," said Aunt Aggie. "It is not to be thought of."

"Then why think of it?" asked Margery.

"To prevent the inevitable disappointment which you would have to suffer if such a thought came into your head," said Aunt Aggie.

"I see. That is all, then, is it not? I think I would rather not talk about it any more. Shall we go downstairs, do you think? Walter will be here any moment."

Mrs. Morrison gave a moment's consideration to this, and really thought she had said all she wanted. So she rose and magnanimously put the "History of Alexandria" down on the table again.

"And I am sure I hope you will enjoy reading about Alexandria," she said, "and the Greeks and Romans. Since Mr. Leveson has given you the book, there is no reason why you should not profit by his kindness. I, for one, do not forbid it, and it would make me feel quite awkward if I

had to return the book to him, and I should scarcely know what to say. Yes, let us go downstairs."

Walter had been away for six months without coming home, and since six months at the age of twenty is a very long space indeed in such boys as hold the seeds of real manhood within them, it was little wonder that Margery, no less than his mother, found him a good deal changed. They had been months of vigorous growth, no less in mind than in the slim tall body of the youth who appeared with broadened shoulders and the firm movements of manhood instead of the brisk boyish jerks that had been characteristic of him. It would convey a quite false impression to say that he was slow either in mind or movement; he was only quiet with the quietness that comes, not of weakness, but of strength. In strength certainly he had enormously developed, and though Margery a couple of years ago had felt herself older and more mature than he, she felt now that there was something lying behind his quietness that would get, though it did not consciously command, respectful attention. She had rather expected this: there was at least something in his late letters to her which found its reason here.

That night she had no private talk with him, for as concession to his long-delayed return his mother had adjourned from the drawing-room to the smoking-room at ten in order to hear "all about it," and had not said that it was bedtime till eleven, when she was surprised to see how late it was. Margery, in spite of her own little heartache at what was coming, would gladly have stayed a little longer if there had been a chance of a quiet friendly word with him—a word of welcome, a word of anything to show how dear he was.

Yet, on the other hand, she shunned it, for—it was awful to feel these things—for he might misunderstand, and think that there was the crown of his home-coming waiting for him. That he would ask for his crown she felt no doubt; a dozen times his eye had sought hers in a way that she understood; a dozen times he had waited for her reply to some question he asked his mother or Olive. The latter had lately taken to knitting, and during conversation was largely absorbed in the counting of stitches. In fact, this evening Mrs. Morrison had incidentally alluded to Olive's excellent habit, and to the lack of it in Margery. This was toward eleven, and, as a matter of fact, she kept an accurate eye on the time, though subsequently she was to wonder at the lateness of the hour. She seldom did things without some microscopical design lying behind them, and she meant not to allude to the time until it was so late that Margery, propelled by a sort of irresistible suction, must certainly follow her at once. But it was still short of eleven, when suction would be irresistible, and she gave an account of their doings.

"Dear me, how interesting it all is," she said, "and to think of your having lived in all these foreign places, while we have been going on here as usual. I often imagined that life abroad must be so very widening, though one never seems to go. Even here we are very busy; I am sure I have hardly a moment to myself, and since Olive has taken to knitting crossovers for all the old women, she has as little time as I. Margery dropped so many stitches it was hardly worth while."

"I expect she dropped more than she picked up," said Walter, looking at her.

"Walter, how beastly of you!" she exclaimed, instinctively going back to childhood again. "Anyhow, there's a photograph of you doing crochet——"

"I do not think I have seen that," said Mrs. Morrison.

"And one of you jumping the lawn-tennis net," said he.

Olive coughed.

"It only requires a little attention," she said. "I can talk perfectly well even when I am going round the corner. Sixteen degrees of frost at Florence, too. Fancy!"

"You must almost have had skating," said Mrs. Morrison. "We had skating here, though much of the time it seemed to me very unsafe, and I did not venture on. Margery skated."

"I bet you fell in," said Walter, again turning to her with a brightened eye.

"Of course I did. You don't stop till you fall in."

"Deep? You never told me. I fell in by the sluice once, do you remember?"

Margery gave a little exclamation of dismay, as if he was in the water now.

"I know," she said. "And Whalley had told us that there were sucking springs underneath. We thought it must be an odd sort of spring if it sucked, but it was dreadful when you quite disappeared. Oh, Walter, I so nearly jumped in, too, and it would have been such a lot of use, as you could swim, and I could not."

This was childhood still; it reasserted its force, although in her heart she knew it to be forceless. But those days had been such dear days, even though Walter fell in above the sucking springs. For the moment the force of them held him too.

"And I came up to find you taking off your skates," he said, "and firmly throwing our lunch into the lake."

Margery laughed.

"Yes, I know I did, and to this day I can't think why," she said. "I thought, I suppose, that something would float and you would catch hold of it. But I thought of jumping in first. I did, indeed."

"Either course," said Olive lucidly, "would be equally useless, if Margery could not swim. We had a ladder and a rope this year, so that in case of anybody falling in you could lay the ladder along the ice and extend the rope. The weight of the rescuer would then be distributed. It is wonderful how people think of such things. Perhaps I should have been as silly as Margery if I had been there. One can never tell."

"You might have unravelled your knitting, Olive, and tied a stone to the end," said Margery, "and sunk it over the hole."

Olive sighed.

"My knitting always annoys you," she said. "I can never think why, unless perhaps because it is useful!"

Margery instantly repented of what was only meant to be taken as lightly as it was said. She told herself that she ought long ago to have known better than to say things like this, and she was sorry that Walter laughed. But, again, how was he to know that things were a little difficult?

"Oh, Olive dear," she said, "it doesn't do anything of the sort. And Mrs. Blundell told me only to-day what a comfort the crossover you gave her was, when she had to go out to open the gate."

It was then that the clock struck eleven.

"Dear me, how time slips away," said Mrs. Morrison. "I had no idea it was so late. I have kept old Blundell on at the lodge, Walter, though for more than two years he has seemed to me to be past his work, for it must be quite that since he kept us waiting there, and I saw him next morning. I remember, and though I meant to dismiss him I let him hang on. And Olive has knitted a crossover for his wife, who says she is a teetotaler, and I have no real reason to doubt it, and they both seem respectable. But you will do as you like, of course. Your father was too generous, I think, about pensioning, for what one gets the others all expect. But do not let us talk business on the evening of your coming home. Yes, eleven already. Come, girls, we must go to bed at once. Margery, will you light our candles, please? Walter will want to go to bed, too, after his night-journey. You had better light all four candles."

CHAPTER V

MRS. MORRISON had formed early in life—before, in fact, she was conscious of forming anything—the habit of sleeping very well. This, combined with the habit of never having anything particular to think about (a habit which had grown with years), led her, as a rule, to pass long, quiet nights of complete unconsciousness. But to-day she had allowed herself to think rather heavily in the morning about her coming interview with Margery, and when they went upstairs with their bedroom candles that evening she lapsed into thought again, and remained awake till she had gone over in her mind what had occurred, and also formed another plan.

With regard to the first part of her meditations she was rather surprised, when she thought over her interview with Margery, to find that nothing had occurred. During that interview she had formed the impression (which was true) that she was saying all she meant to say, but until this moment, when she had put out her candle after getting into bed, it had not struck her that it took two to make an interview, and that Margery had really taken no positive part in it. Mrs. Morrison, in fact, had delivered an ultimatum, or rather a couple of ultimata, and Margery (this was what it came to) had said "Oh." True, she had assented to the fact of her childish intimacy with Walter being over, but—and Mrs. Morrison almost sat up in bed as the appalling

thought occurred to her—this concurrence with her ultimatum might conceivably be taken in two senses. Could Margery be so deceitful as to grant that childish intimacy was over, meaning that a more mature condition of the affections had taken its place? Certainly Walter had paid her a great deal of attention that evening, and had made far more of her than there was the slightest call for him to do. For instance, when Olive wanted her knitting, it was only usual for Margery to go to fetch it. But Walter had said, "Nonsense; I'll get it." And he had got it. In the old days he would not; it would have been more likely for him to allow Margery to fetch something he wanted. And, again and again, Mrs. Morrison had seen him looking at Margery. What for, she could not conjecture; she had been so used to consider the girl angular, awkward, queer, that the habit had destroyed her faculty of observation. But was Margery angular, and awkward, and queer?

Virgil has compared the vagaries of no less a personage than Dido Queen of Carthage, when she gave her somewhat savage heart to the pious Æneas, to the swift antics of a spinning top. The metaphor as applied to so august a personage under the influence of so august a passion as love may seem to be a little wanting in dignity, but it admirably expresses the state of mind into which a thoroughly unimaginative woman like Mrs. Morrison may get, when the rind of her torpidity has been pierced, and she finds herself confronted by a variety of things which she wants not to happen. Like the insensate top, wildly whirling, she butted against a quantity of objects, the stability of which was utterly unknown to her. There were certain objects around

her; there was Walter, the real Walter, the young man who felt and willed and desired, and she had no more idea whether he was a solid wall against which she might fatally dash herself, or a mere ninepin which she might easily overset without even feeling the impact, than she had any idea who or what Margery was. But her string, so to speak, had been smartly pulled, and she who had stood quiescent so long was madly spinning. There was the fickle archæologist also; of what texture was he? There was Olive also, but she had less apprehension there: Olive probably would do what she was told. But would the other three? What were they made of? She could not possibly tell; all her life she had never known anything. She moved to a certain extent among other people, but she was like a diver in deep seas (though her agitation now was like that of a top), surrounded by the iron headpiece of her own impenetrability. She saw them through glass; she touched them with encased fingers; she did not even breathe the air that others breathed, but fed her lungs through the pump that supplied her with puffs of compressed conventionality.

Toplike again, she had whirled about among these inscrutable objects. She had whirled up to what she had thought was a mere ninepin, Margery, this afternoon, intending to just give her one touch, and then pass on. But now she was not quite sure whether Margery was not standing there quite as firmly as before, and whether it was not herself who had received a knock that sent her off at a tangent. When she came to think it over, Margery had given no promise or guarantee of any kind with regard either to Walter or Mr. Leveson. She had allowed that the days

of childish intimacy with Walter were over, but as poor Mrs. Morrison saw now, several hours later, that might mean practically anything, while she knew no more about Margery's feeling for Mr. Leveson than she did before she had gone humming up to that figure. Margery had told her nothing, and such knowledge as she had picked up, namely, that he had given her niece a book, and had written to her, was far from reassuring. It was one thing to assure Margery that all this meant nothing at all; it was quite another to assure herself on the point.

And at this fatal moment she formed a plan. Without complete knowledge of all the plans that have ever been formed, it would be rash to call this the most infelicitous possible, but it would be understating the case to call it very infelicitous indeed. But her imagination was like a chicken that has just been hatched. Hitherto she had been bounded by her own shell. Now the wide world extended on every side. And the plan was to go and see Mrs. Leveson. Poor top! it provoked collisions, it set out to find them.

All this spinning and whirling and collision was gratuitous activity — at any rate, it might all have been saved if Mrs. Morrison had before now practised a quieter and more tender movement. Love, which unlocks every door and is the master-key that opens all hearts, would so easily and inevitably have told her all she did not know, and made clear to her the nature of those objects among which she was now so impotently whirling. And yet though the wards of that key are so simple, there is no artificer cunning enough to fashion one that shall do its work. Those who own it not

must break burglariously into the hearts they wish to enter, and when they think they have come there, they find never the treasure they contain, and miss all that is of value. For, we must suppose, some blind kind of madness seizes them, so that they load themselves with all those things which are any man's, and leave untouched, for to them they are invisible, the pearls and the rubies and all of which the price is beyond rubies.

It was so, at any rate, with poor Mrs. Morrison; she had failed (in that she had never tried) to enter the hearts of those round her by the royal door, and now sought to enter as a house-breaker, and, if necessary, as a heart-breaker. It was, therefore, only to be expected, though she did not know this, that she would find laid out for her nothing that was worth her search. Yet for all these years Margery had stood with her heart-key in her hand, offering it her.

Mrs. Morrison had tried Margery, so to speak, had broken in, and when afterward she counted her spoils, she found she had taken nothing worth carrying away. She was not deterred, however, and so formed the very infelicitous plan of raiding Mrs. Leveson. This she proposed to do without delay on the next afternoon. The morning she spent mainly with Walter, still burglarious in spirit, but in other respects talking to him in the most open possible manner about the things which obviously concerned him and her. Occasionally she made a grab. "I have purposely left half a dozen rooms vacant," she said, "so that you could ask any personal friends of yours to your coming of age. Let me see, there are six rooms here — no, seven, because Margery — er — suggested my using her sitting-room as a guest-room

for that week. It is very comfortable, I am sure, and when I went upstairs to see her yesterday afternoon — I often go — she was toasting away in front of the fire, though the day was quite warm. Olive has no sitting-room of her own."

"The library is pretty comfortable," said Walter guilelessly.

"Yes, dear. I am sure I don't want Olive to be uncomfortable, though no doubt she will have to go elsewhere when you and Mr. Saunders have your talk —— "

"Mr. Saunders?" asked Walter.

"Yes, the solicitor. There will be documents to sign, I should not wonder, and deeds to be read to you. Probably it will take half the day. No doubt Olive will be out if it is fine; if not, she must come and sit in my room, and I dare say I can contrive a writing-table for her, if she wants to answer letters. She will be the last to make a disturbance."

Then came a grab.

"I'm sure Margery has been looking forward to your coming home as much as any of us," she said. "How do you think she looks? Dear child, shall I ever forget how plain and peaked she was when she first came to us? I see little difference in Margery."

Walter had begun to take notice. This was a burglarious entry, and he left none of his treasures about.

"I don't think most people would consider Margery very plain," he said. "And she is not peaked, do you think? I thought she looked very well last night."

"It would be a wonder if she wasn't well," said his mother, "with nothing to worry her from morning till evening, or from January to December. And whatever your arrange-

ments are, Walter, Margery will find a clean, decent home with me. I told her so yesterday."

This was business again, and Walter attended much less closely. But his frank, wholesome face expressed a little surprise.

"I don't quite understand," he said. "I have no intention of making changes. Did you think I was going to turn you and Olive and Margery out of the house?"

"You have given me no hint of any of your intentions, Walter," observed his mother.

"No; I haven't got any. I had better talk it over with Mr. Saunders, hadn't I? I remember you once told me you had a jointure of three thousand a year."

The unfortunate spinning-top took a sudden lurch in this direction.

"That is quite true," said Mrs. Morrison, "but what with rates and taxes — not to mention income-tax which goes up by leaps and bounds, though what Mr. Asquith does with it all passes my comprehension, and little enough to show for it, I should be puzzled to keep the Curzon Street house open and perhaps a little place in the country, with Margery growing up and Olive not being married, though I dare say any day something may happen to either of them."

From this superb discursiveness (Mrs. Morrison had, literally, rather enjoyed a somewhat sleepless night, and her mind was more disheveled than usual), Walter detached a subject or two.

"I don't think income-tax has anything to do with your income, mother," he said, "because I fancy you enjoy it free of tax. Not that that is of any importance. What I had

proposed to do after next week was—well, was nothing at all. I have got this examination for the Diplomatic Service ahead of me, and, if I pass, and get some post, of course I shall be abroad, and have my work to do. I had never contemplated making any change in your way of life. I should not let this house, or do anything of that kind. There is plenty of money, is there not? I mean you have all lived here, and in Curzon Street, quite comfortably. I like the thought of the house going on as usual. And if I don't pass, I shall have to go on studying for another year or another two years. I have no intention, because I shall be, well, rich, of doing nothing. I wanted to go into this service, and nothing has happened to change my views. It is absurd for me to settle down, and hunt, and dance, and play the fool, because I can afford to do so. One must try to have a career of some sort, at least I think so. I don't want to stuff away in the House of Commons; I don't want to be a soldier. I settled — oh, ages ago — three years ago nearly, to try to get into diplomacy. I suppose I shall want a little more money than before. But I can do that without upsetting you. I want everything to go on just as before."

Walter delivered this long speech as if it was not a speech at all, as indeed it was not. The sentences were jerked out and punctuated by little movements, now of a long leg, now of a flicked cigarette ash. And the spirit that dictated it was of a charming youthful modesty, a reluctance to the thrust into dictatorship, an effacement of himself. But toward the end he got a little restless, and by the time he had finished he was standing up.

"Of course if I married," he said, "I should have to think

again. Even in that case I should propose to go on in the service, if I get in. I——"

Mrs. Morrison suddenly interrupted.

"You seem to have thought it all out," she said.

"No, not at all," said he. "I have thought nothing out. Ah, that is not quite the case. I have thought one thing out. It is this. I don't quite like Margery having no settled allowance. What I certainly shall do next week is to settle something on her. Isn't that the phrase — settle?"

The question was prompted by his mother's expression of face. She looked as if she was going to sneeze. She appeared to overcome that tendency and answered him.

"I never heard of anything so — so unheard of," she said, making as far as was known the solitary paradox of her life. "Margery is quite comfortable; all her bills are paid by me, and what more can anybody want than to have all their bills paid? And she has never ordered anything unreasonable yet. It would look" — Mrs. Morrison gathered herself together for this astounding feat of imagination — "it would look as if I had said that Margery was extravagant if you allowed her a penny a year!"

Walter shifted from one foot to the other. He had raised a vehemence which he did not in the least understand. It seemed to him best to turn it off with a little joke.

He laughed.

"To allow Margery a penny a year would certainly not make an accusation of extravagance against her," he said.

Mrs. Morrison rustled in her chair, trying to recover her equanimity. Somehow the idea of an independent Margery went against her grain. Margery was synonymous with the

idea of dependence and her own generosity. She could not think of them apart. With her no mental readjustment was possible without violence. Her thoughts, as has been mentioned, pursued their way down polished ruts and channels, and it required a side-slip of a terrifying kind to jolt them out of these well-worn ways.

"I do not think that Margery would thank you for making any such provision for her," she said. "She has been accustomed to rely entirely on what I do for her, and it would seem strange to her to have things different. No, she would not thank you."

Walter looked quietly, candidly, at his mother. His face, as became his years, was intensely youthful, his instinct, as became his years also, was manly, not boyish.

"I don't want her to thank me," he said. "You have looked after Margery up till now. Now it is my business to do so."

Then suddenly — as became his years — he blushed. "After all, that is only my plan," he said. "As you say, anything may happen to Margery, or you, or Olive, or me."

Mrs. Morrison remembered her sleepless (or partially sleepless) night and, turning her attention for the moment completely to herself, was startled by the phrase. The liveliest emotion she ever experienced was a horror of being ill, and Walter's dreadful suggestion of anything "happening" to her evoked that spectre.

"I don't look ill, do I?" she asked, the question being not so inconsequent as it sounded.

"Dear me, no, the picture of health, I am glad to say," remarked Walter placidly. "You don't feel unwell, do you?"

"No, dear, but you speak so lightly of things happening to me," said she. "Well, Margery will be glad to know, I am sure, that you are not thinking of letting Ballards, where she has been so happy for so long. And now I must go and see the cook. I usually see her at eleven, and it is already half-past. She will think it strange if I put it off any longer, though I am sure I should enjoy sitting here and talking to you all the morning."

Mrs. Morrison wanted a private interview that afternoon with Mrs. Leveson, and so she settled that Olive, who usually accompanied her on her drives, had a cold, and had better not risk the danger of being caught in a shower far away from home. She then set out alone, with her Japanese pug, who, a victim to her stupifying intimacy, now seldom woke up except to be fed. The two fat horses as well as the coachman had been duly got rid of, the lodge-gates were opened to her without pause, by a young woman more up to her work than poor old Mrs. Blundell, and she swept along the roads in her motor at a brisker pace than when she paid her first call on the Levesons. She had settled the main lines of her interview during the night (adding a little this morning), and, though interviews are apt to develop weird divergencies from our preconceived notions of them, owing to the victim not always saying exactly what we have designed for him, such fiasco could hardly be expected here, since Mrs. Leveson was not required to say anything whatever. She had merely got to listen to what was said to her. By the kindly coöperation of Providence, she was in, while Arnold was out, and suggested a stroll through the garden. Mrs. Morrison instantly found that she was a little cold and

cramped with her drive, and thought it would be very pleasant. Indeed, she would have suggested it. And since she had come on business, she got to work without loss of time. Besides, Arnold might return at any time.

"Yes, I'm sure your garden is looking beautiful," she said, "but what an army of men it must take to keep it in such order. And what supervision, too, on your part. Often when I go out after breakfast to look round with our head man, it is lunch time before I know where I am. I hope Walter will take that off my hands while he is at home, though dear Olive of course has helped me a great deal, and she has a wonderful head for names. Often I can only say, 'Some of the yellow things we had last spring, Sadicow'—such an odd name: my husband used to wonder whether it was Scandinavian—but Olive always knows whether I mean daffodils or not."

Mrs. Leveson smiled.

"I always mean daffodils, so to speak," she said. "There is magic about them."

But Mrs. Morrison had no intention of letting the conversation drift away to daffodils. She jerked it firmly back, pulling it on to its haunches. She did not mean to risk another interruption either, and so left out all her full stops.

"Olive is so fond of them, too," she said, "but Olive is fond of everything beautiful. She had a little cold to-day, and I with difficulty persuaded her to stop at home and mind it. But I assure you it was no easy matter when she knew where my drive was going to take me. She is so fond of this place, and I remember her anxiety when we heard that it had been taken, and her wonder as to whether we

should get to be friends with the new-comers. How odd that seems to look back on now, for as she was saying the other day it is as if we had been friends all our lives. She does not make friends very easily either, she is a little exacting and fastidious; I have often told her so. But this time, dear Mrs. Leveson, you can guess whether I had to tell her she was too fastidious! I assure you scarcely a week passes without her wondering how Mr. Arnold's book on the ancient Eygptians is getting on. How interesting all — all that period must be."

That was better: though the speaker sometimes thought that Mrs. Leveson was not very clever, she could hardly fail to grasp the trend of these remarks. And she did not fail; there was no reason for anxiety on this score.

"Arnold has finished his book," she observed. "Indeed, he finished it many weeks ago, and it has been published a fortnight now."

"And to think of me not having seen it, nor Olive either," exclaimed Mrs. Morrison. "Dear child, how excited she will be. There will be a telegram to the publisher or I am much mistaken. And what will he turn his attention to next? I shall never be forgiven unless I learn all about it. More of the Egyptians will it be, do you think, or will he tell us about the ancient Greeks or Romans? Or will he take a rest, and enjoy himself? I'm sure we can give him capital lawn tennis or golf any day he cares to come over, now Walter is at home again. He and Olive would make a great match, I am sure, against Walter and Margery."

Quite suddenly Mrs. Leveson found herself believing

hardly a word of what her companion was saying. Exactly why she felt that, it would be hard to say, except that it seemed obvious. She did not believe that Olive had a cold, or that she asked after Arnold's work, or that she promised to read the book, or that she made these gratifying remarks —she so fastidious—about her neighbours. None of this seemed the least characteristic of Olive, but, on the other hand, it seemed vitally characteristic of any not very wise mother making plans. They were not bad, as plans; the want of wisdom was shown in mentioning them. She would have been very sorry, had she believed these things to be true, because she had more than an inkling of what was going on in Arnold's mind. But she had no chance to say anything, for Mrs. Morrison continued without pause. What followed was superfluous, because Mrs. Leveson completely saw what she meant already, but it was impossible to tell her that.

"Such a joy to me, of course, is Walter's home-coming," she said, "but I shall be busier than ever now, for it is the part of a mother, is it not, to look after her son as much as after her daughter? Even more, perhaps, as young men are so easily led away. I want him to marry, oh, quite, quite soon, for I believe in early marriages, since I was married myself out of the schoolroom almost; and how happy I was, to be sure! Do you not wish the same for Mr. Arnold? Is it not high time he settled down and married? Indeed, I am almost vexed with him when I think of the years he gives to the ancient Egyptians, though I am sure nothing could be more interesting, instead of getting some nice girl to be his wife, and help him in his work, provided

their tastes were similar. Dear me, yes, I have thought so a thousand times."

Mrs. Morrison, it may be noticed, was really saying the same thing over and over again in different words, for fear that her companion should fail to grasp her sense, for, as has been seen, she had no very high opinion of Mrs. Leveson's abilities. Her estimate of anybody's ability, indeed, was chiefly measured by the frequency with which he said things which as soon as spoken she imagined she had often thought of, though she had not troubled to put them into words. But Mrs. Leveson seldom gave utterance to these gems; her conversation (when she was permitted to have any) seemed to Mrs. Morrison to be singularly commonplace, and she supposed that Arnold must have inherited his brains from his father, though his money would come from his mother's side as well. However, brains and money were both very nice things.

"Yes, like attracts like," said Mrs. Leveson, with a certain dryness.

That was the kind of thing; anybody could say that. What followed was intelligible, and so merited hardly more attention.

"But one's fellow men are so curious, are they not?" she continued. "And in nothing more curious than in the question of selection. They say matches are made in heaven, and in that case they are only arranged on earth. And arrangement is such an inferior achievement compared to creation."

This was more cryptic than usual. It was, in fact, intended to confuse, for Mrs. Leveson had had about enough

repetition. She felt some very slight resentment at being supposed to be so stupid that it was necessary to say things over again so very frequently, and, by distracting Mrs. Morrison's mind, it seemed to her that she might get something said which she wanted to hear. In intention, her remark was made almost as one may speak to a person who is talking in sleep; a little quiet distraction may induce her to ramble on about something else.

"Yes, I am sure that is so," said Mrs. Morrison hurriedly. "And I have often thought so myself. After all, one can only arrange, and I am sure I have had plenty of that lately, with Walter coming home. So thoughtful he is, too; I declare he thinks of everybody, even of poor Margery. Young men are so chivalrous, are they not?"

"Ah, how is Margery?" asked Mrs. Leveson.

"Margery is always well," said Mrs. Morrison. "I often wish I had half her health. Such a sad childhood, too, though, of course, we don't speak of it. It nearly broke my poor husband's heart — I mean his brother's marriage. A dreadful thing when your brother marries nobody knows whom, though heaven forbid I should speak evil of the dead. What a fatal thing prettiness is, is it not? It so often goes with frailty, though one hopes not quite always."

Mrs. Morrison, in spite of her imperturbable flow of meaningless language, had to pause for a moment. She wanted, above all things, to convey an idea of the general impossibility of anybody marrying Margery, but she was moderately averse to telling downright lies. So she continued, in sentences that were not quite untrue. Each sentence, that is to say, did not contain a falsehood, nor even did any one sentence

contain a whole one. But that was all that could be said on the score of veracity. Her conscience, also, surprising as it may sound, acquitted her, for she told herself that she was not spoiling any sort of chance Margery might have, since she did not believe that Margery had any. Nobody can spoil the non-existent. But in the next two or three minutes the eternal justice must have sent her to hell.

"Such a sad story," she observed, "though, as I say, we never speak of it, and I have brought up Margery never to think of her mother. I am so deeply thankful that I was able to take the place of the one she lost. Quite a common actress, and on the music-hall stage, or something of the kind, the front row of them, you know, with legs. I don't say anything against her, but that was the sort of person she was. Poor Leonard, my Leonard, as I say, was quite heart-broken, but Norman was so susceptible and headstrong. He said he was so divinely happy, too; yes, the two brothers had a dreadful quarrel, and Norman even let himself say that he hoped that my Leonard might be as happy in his marriage (that was me) as he was in his. Of course, I forgive and forget all that. And then after Norman's death, what must his wife do but go back to the stage again, sadly aged, of course, and much inferior to what even she was before. Poor Margery; sometimes I look at her with dread for fear of seeing some low trait which she inherited from her mother coming out in her. She is but a child yet, and perhaps it is still full early to look for it. Of course, I only look for it in order to nip it in the bud — if indeed you can nip hereditary tendencies.

Mrs. Morrison was so much absorbed in her brilliant story

that she did not notice a very distinct change that had come over her companion's face. Still less, of course, did she notice the far more distinct change that had come over her companion's mind. Mrs. Leveson's eyes, usually kind and patient, were smouldering; her mind was more than smouldering — it was in a blaze.

"Pray tell me," she said quietly, "do you know anything against Margery's mother? She was an actress, you tell me, but I suppose anybody can be an actress, if she has the gift, and yet be respectable, in the old sense, I mean, worthy of your respect or mine or even Mrs. Grundy's."

"Of course, one does not listen to mere stories ——" began Mrs. Morrison.

"But were there any mere stories to listen to?" asked the other.

"I cannot say that any positively reached me," said Mrs. Morrison, still quite unconscious of an unfavourable atmosphere. "But you know what everybody says when a man of very good family is so foolish as to marry into that class. And then her going back to the stage again; so much aged! It is as if a converted infidel relapsed again. I think it so fortunate that I was able to rescue Margery before her mind was tainted. I dare say her mother was kind to her; I believe that class have a sort of general good-humour, and are not cruel, of course, or anything of that kind. I make no accusation; I always want to see the best in everybody, as I am sure we all should. And when Margery is rather rough and romping, I try not to think that it is that dreadful strain of blood asserting itself. It is better to suppose that it is only an exuberance of childhood. Children must not

be judged as if they were grown up. What a philosophy of life one could write, if one had the time! It is a wonderful thing to have children, and observe their ways."

This was a premeditated peroration. It had been fashioned in the waking hours of the night before, and rounded everything up in a manner that seemed entirely satisfactory. It seemed satisfactory, at any rate, to its inventor, at the moment of its conception, and it was almost as satisfactory now. At the conclusion, Mrs. Morrison drew a long breath and heaved a deep sigh.

"How they all grow up round one!" she said, inspired by an afterthought.

Mrs. Leveson looked once at the horizon and once at her companion. Her eyes smouldered no longer, nor did her mind blaze. She had been angry, it is true, at the suspicion that Mrs. Morrison was, if not telling lies, telling the truth dressed up in the clothes of lies, but now that she felt quite certain that this was the case, it no longer seemed to be a thing worthy of indignation; it was worthy (if of anything) of pity. For the whole was such a tragic failure, as things were. Mrs. Morrison had so utterly overdone it. Her point was so obvious, and it was no less obvious that she was calling feeble fiction (as in the case of Olive) to aid it, and feeble false impressions (as in the case of Margery) to serve the same end. Walter, too, was evidently an anxiety to her, and Walter, to her mind, was an anxiety also. She hoped, with almost an ecstasy of maternal longing, that Margery was not giving any real cause of anxiety to her aunt in his regard. She liked Walter, for it was quite impossible to help liking that dear, handsome boy, and she hoped that

Margery did not feel toward him, as she told herself she would certainly have done when she was eighteen. Mrs. Morrison's pictures, in fact, of Arnold and Olive playing against Walter and Margery did not at all appeal to her. One side of that match she knew was impossible; she longed to know that the other was impossible also. But she was by now perfectly aware that Mrs. Morrison was full of information that bore no direct relationship to truth, and yet . . . and yet she herself might be able to disentangle the copious strands.

"How pleased Margery must be to get Walter back," she said tentatively. "So much tennis and golf for her."

But Mrs. Morrison had finished; she had discussed all she wanted to discuss with Arnold's mother; or, in other words, she had said all she meant to say. She thought Mrs. Leveson understood by now.

"Walter has but little time for games now," she said, though but lately she had welcomed Arnold to any amount of them, "what with his examination coming on so soon. Sometimes I wonder whether poor Margery had not better go out into the world, and be a governess or something useful. She is an excellent German scholar and plays the piano delightfully. She is very independent, too, and would like to make her own way. But I should be sorry to lose her."

Mrs. Leveson understood this also, and gathered quite correctly that there was supposed to be some danger of Walter wishing to marry Margery. At any rate, the speech implied that Mrs. Morrison did not wish the two to be much together. Nor for that matter did she herself. She did not

consider it necessary to tell Mrs. Morrison this, nor her reason for it, because she did not want her to have a fit.

It is a pathetic thing to record, but the truth is that Mrs. Morrison buzzed home again after tea in excellent spirits, fully believing that she had put in quite a quantity of fine work. Indeed, she permitted herself to indulge in a great many complacent reflections on her own powers as a diplomatist, and foresaw a brilliant career for Walter, if he only proved to have inherited them. Diplomacy, even of this very elementary kind, was something of a new accomplishment to her, and she supposed that it must be easier than she had hitherto imagined, or that she was cleverer than she had ever given herself credit for. By degrees she inclined more and more to the second of these alternatives, and felt that the task that perhaps lay before her now, of cooking Margery's goose, so to speak, with regard to Walter, was an operation well within her culinary powers. She could almost smell the rich savour of the roasting bird. It was a happy thought, that of sending Margery into the world as a governess, and it required hardly any effort of the imagination to persuade herself, in the course of a few minutes, that she would miss the girl very much, but that the step would be for her good. It was true that she had often planned a different future for Margery, in which till the end of time she would be companion to herself, but she quickly saw now that such was a selfish scheme, and one framed only to minister to her own comfort. Perhaps it might come off later on, when Walter was married, and no doubt Olive also, but for the present how much more advantageous for Margery to practise her independence and her excellent German. The

Morlands, she knew, wanted a governess for the younger children, and Harry Morland, Walter's friend, was already quite a friend of Margery's. That would make it so pleasant for her. And even if he, after the hot-headed manner of youth, which in Mrs. Morrison's idea made every young man want to marry any young woman, fell in love with Margery, it would be Mrs. Morland's part to nip that little flower in the bud. For herself, she had no wish to stand in Margery's way and would be delighted to give her such a chance. Then for a moment she thought of Olive. No; Harry was too young for Olive, and not quite up to the mark which her mother had planned for her. But what a chance for Margery! That would be far better than the village schoolmaster. But it really was a great sacrifice to part with Margery. She must get that wrench over as soon as possible, and though she hardly ever wrote letters in the evening, she determined to write to Mrs. Morland before dinner.

Meantime, at home, Olive having been told she had a cold, sneezed once or twice, and after her mother's departure, proceeded with her knitting to the library, with the laudable intention of finishing a crossover before tea. She had suggested, though in quite a casual manner, that Margery might come and read to her all the afternoon, but Walter had objected to that, and had claimed her companionship for the ramble they always took together on his return from school or abroad, to visit stable and farmyard, and other places of interest where there were birds and animals. Up till now that custom had never been omitted, and it was but an ordinary request he made to-day. He proposed it serene-

ly and cheerfully, as a matter of routine which Olive had forgotten, but Margery, for the first time, was reluctant.

"Won't it do to-morrow, Walter?" she said; "if Olive is lonely? One doesn't like to leave her all by herself."

"Would you rather not come?" he asked.

Margery knew that her reluctance was only dictated by a temporizing impulse, and abandoned it.

"No, I would much sooner come," she said quickly.

It was a tall, wholesome young couple that set out on that day of warm wind and fleecy clouds, when all things told of spring to the buds and to birds and animals of mating-time. The gale of the evening before had altogether passed, and of its passage nothing was left but the vigour and cleanliness of earth and sky, washed by the rain, renewed by the riotous wind. In front of them as they set out up the grass slope before the house, lay the knoll where Walter had ferreted. To right and left the beechwoods had the dim purple of spring upon them, and the clear branches scrubbed and dried by the gale stood vigorous and upright against the sky.

"Oh, they've been so nicely shampooed," said Margery, "and their hair is all on end. Mine will be too, unless I put on a hat. But need I, do you think? We shall only go to the farm and stables and into the woods?"

He looked at her a moment, trying, honestly trying to recapture for a little the unconscious zest of childhood, when to be alive on a spring day was enough for anybody, be he boy or girl. And such spring days were indissolubly bound up in his mind with a wild-haired ecstatic Margery, who raced him up hill and down, and sought for the shy violets that hid so successfully underneath their varnished leaves,

or followed, wide-eyed and breathless, the antics of the squirrels and wild things of the wood. For the sake of old times, even though the present held so much more, he would have liked to recapture that. But it was only make-believe; he might as well have hoped to shut in his hands the glinting lights that came filtering through the budding branches of the beeches. It was only with an effort, with an exercise of memory that he could recall the enchantment of those days, which, while they were his, held only unconscious enchantment. Now he could recall it, be conscious of it, and the very fact of that showed that they were over.

"It's a new idea for you to have a hat when we go in the woods," he said. "Or do you want one?"

"Not I. We've got a tremendous lot to see. It's so long since you were here. Let's begin with the woods. They have felled that copse of hazel by the lake — the primroses have simply descended in showers. There were none before. But now it is one mass of them, and soon it will be blue with wild hyacinths. Isn't it nice of Nature? We cut down her pretty trees, and instead of being angry, she lays down a new carpet at once, to make it gay till the trees grow again."

But Margery was making her effort no less than he, and for her it was harder. She longed, knowing her own heart, much more eagerly than he did, for the past days and years to return to them, so that they should have no thought except for the birds and beasts and flowers. And she knew, though as yet no word of other things had passed between them, how utterly childhood had passed away, and felt, with a keenness of regret that was beyond him, the envy of the eternal youth

of Nature, who each year makes all things young again. The primroses this year were just like the primroses of other years, the birches were no less youthful, or, if they were a year older, a year taller, the magic of spring gave back their childhood to them on those April days, when the same effervescence of returning sap and promise of May tingled through their branches. It might be that the scuttling squirrels that to-day whisked and scurried at their approach, were the babies of last year, or that the chuckling thrushes, that flitted in and out of the rhododendron bushes were but in the egg when last she and Walter took the spring walk of his home-coming, but to the eye all was as it had been twelve months ago. It was she who was different, and he.

But for a little they were both successful in overcoming, not the shadow, but the sunshine of years that were bringing them to maturity, and they played at old days. Yet even thus maturity stepped in; he, shyly, but with all the fury of his budding manhood longed for the silly pretence to break down, though with lip service he kept it up to suit her mood, while she, dreading what was coming, liking him with that affection which conventionalists have agreed to call sisterly, but which is nothing of the sort, desperately delayed, though she knew the futility of her effort, the conclusion which was already quite foregone. That she more than guessed from his letters, and her own heart taught her the answer, the interpretation. For she was not a child now; she could more than imagine what was going on in him, from what she dimly felt herself. But in that feeling he had no part; it was hers only, so far as she knew. But she knew that if another, not he, had been taking the spring-walk with

her, she would have waited for pretences to break down, even as he did.

And thus, not at cross-purposes, but with dreadful divergence of yearning, they visited old places again, the copse of hazel-wood by the lake, the lake itself with the shattered reflections of trees in it, the stone sluice and the mysterious sucking springs, the thought of which had caused Margery so tremendous an anguish on the day that the ice gave way, and exposed Walter to their fathomless influence. Close by was the thorn-bush where one year a pair of goldfinches had nested, and even as they passed it the glint of an unusual wing made the memory to start into their minds again, so that they climbed the hill, covered with the brown of dead bracken in eager reminiscences of the day when the nest was full of gentle gaping young, unfledged and helpless, a construction of big eye and open mouth. Till this year goldfinches had not been seen again, but to-day there was no doubt as to the identity of that delightful visitor.

Walter was walking in front of her, as they climbed the steep brae, and he had reached the top some six yards before her. And there he waited, while she climbed the last few steps. He, like her, was bareheaded, and the wind that caught them on the top, and blew her hair down over her forehead, made his short, black curls stand up straight. He was flushed with the steepness of the ascent, and stood with head bent toward her, and the sweet smell of his rough homespun suit was carried to her open nostril. And as she got near him, she looked up, and saw that his face was lit with more than the glow of exercise; he waited for her, he was expectant of her coming. And, seeing that, she looked to

her steps again, for the pebbles of the gravel slope were slippery and yielded beneath her feet.

"Here, take my hand, Margery," he said.

It was idle and useless not to do so, and with one hand in his, one on the rough sleeve of his coat, she gained the top.

"Thanks, Walter," she said, "it is slippery ——"

And then she stopped. For his other hand closed over hers, and very quietly, very strongly he pulled her up to him.

"Margery," he said, "you didn't kiss me when I came home yesterday. Will you kiss me now? It will mean ——"

Margery raised an imploring face to his.

"Oh, Walter, dear Walter, please don't!" she said.

But he seemed not to have heard. Roughly and irresistibly, as far as strength was concerned, he pulled her to him and kissed her — kissed her on the forehead and the eyes, and the cheeks, and the mouth.

"It's that," he said. "I love you — don't you see?"

And then he saw.

"I beg your pardon, Margery," he said. "It was damnable of me. I didn't think."

And he let her go.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm most awfully sorry. I behaved like a cad!"

For a moment Margery had felt angry. The moment after, she could not have conceived that such a thought as anger had been hers. Her friend, the best that a girl could have, was standing by her, the boy who had been the idol and the sun of her childhood. It was Walter, in fact; there were no words that expressed him so well as his sheer name.

Something inside Margery's throat swelled, swelled, swelled. She had thought over this which she knew was coming, but her worst forebodings fell so far short of the actual truth of it that she seemed to be facing a position she had never imagined. All the values were changed now that this happened. She had not known how much she liked him, and, till he kissed her like that, she had not had the remotest idea how far she was from loving him. And for reply she just sat down on the brown bracken and began to cry, burying her face from him, learning by this cruel contrast what love meant. Walter was no less dear; he was more dear, and that somehow separated him the farther.

He did not touch her, or come near to her. The innate delicacy of the boy so utterly forbade that that it did not even occur to him. He looked down on the shining lake, on the brown hillside up which they had climbed, at the little folded shoots of bracken which were pushing up through the *débris* of the autumn. At last he spoke.

"Margery, do stop crying," he said. "Shall I go home?"

"No, you darling!" said she. "P-please don't. I — I can't bear it. Just wait a minute. I will stop being such a fool soon. And — and then I'll explain. Oh, sit down. Sit by me here, if you don't mind. And don't say you're sorry. I can't bear it. It's me."

Margery indicated where he was to sit, with an errant hand. What he had said, what he had done, revealed him to her less than it revealed her to herself. She knew now, in a flash, cruel and wise, what she had been only dimly conscious of, knew that her heart was not her own to give. Otherwise, she must have let him take her, all that she knew

of herself, take her, teach her, and turn her deep and eager affection for him into love.

Her crying ceased very quickly, for she was not crying for herself, but for him, and if she could help him at all or comfort him, it was not by making a goose of herself like this. So like a wise little woman she stopped.

"Oh, Walter, dear, I am so sorry," she said, "and I feel such a brute. Thank you ever, ever so much for loving me. But though it is so dear of you, please try not to. You know how I like you, and what jolly times we have always had. Won't, won't that do? Do you want the other so much?"

Walter looked at her a moment in silence, his lip quivering, and Margery remarked how she had only seen that once before, when he found a dog that he had lost caught in a trap.

"It isn't the question of what I want," he said, "it is the question of what I am. I am just that, your lover. Can you give me any hope? I'll wait just as long as you like."

"I know you would, dear," said she, "and, oh, how gladly I would wait if I thought that it would do any good. If you want anything of that sort, of course we will wait; I will tell you in a month, or a week, or six months, when you choose."

Walter was silent again.

"But you think, you feel sure, it will do no good?" he asked at length.

"Yes, I feel sure," said Margery below her breath. Walter did not ask what is commonly the question of one rejected, as to whether there was somebody else. If Margery did not choose to tell him that, it seemed to him very unfair that he should take advantage of her distress for him, her pas-

sionate desire (for he made no doubt of that) to help him in any possible way, to ask her that. If there was no one else she would surely, for his comfort, tell him so; while if there was, and she did not wish to tell him, it was no business of his. So he did not even ask her how it was that she was sure.

But the corresponding train of thought had been going on in her mind, and in a moment she spoke again.

"There is some one else," she said, "though he doesn't know it, poor wretch."

Walter could not help smiling; this was so comically characteristic of Margery.

"Pity you can't tell him. But I don't think I can offer to do it for you. There are limits. Or shall I make an effort?"

There was something heartrending to Margery in that very small joke, which nearly made her cry again. He was so gentle and gallant, and even now was thinking of himself not at all, but of her completely and entirely. And as he spoke, he leaned back on the dry brown bracken and turned a little away from her.

"Thanks for telling me," he said. "And I hope, I do really, that the poor wretch, whoever he is, will soon know. And that — that you will get your heart's desire. I want that more than anything, I think. And look here, Margery, I'm not going to make an ass of myself or bother you. I'm going to take what has happened standing up, and being cheerful and natural. I think a man must be too feeble for words if he does anything else. That's all, I think. Let's get on."

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS with scarcely concealed satisfaction that Mrs. Leveson saw that Arnold, after the completion of his book on Alexandria, showed no inclination to set to work again on some fresh subject of research, and it afforded her no less pleasure, now that the book was published, to observe how little he seemed to care about the shoals of highly eulogistic press notices which poured in, or about the many letters from learned professors which were so full of congratulations on the subject of his acute and illuminating work. Even the detection of a glaring misprint after the book was published seemed to worry him but little, though an error of no greater magnitude in a mere contribution to an archæological journal a year or two before had made him take the gloomiest view of himself as a scholar who had pretensions toward accuracy. In other respects, also, he was changed, even to her eye, which saw him constantly, day after day, and so would be less likely to note change, but rather to get accustomed to it before it was consciously noted, and his regularity of habits, which hitherto had been, so she would have guessed, invincible and invulnerable, showed strange and unsuspected harness-joints. He no longer even, while his book was still in hand, sat down to his work at fixed and stated hours, during which he was as unapproachable as the High Priest when he went to the Holy of Holies, but would sit with her after breakfast talking on topics that

before had practically no existence for him, and letting the chiming of the sacred hour pass unnoticed. On other days he occasionally even gave up the morning's work altogether and rode or loitered with her in the garden, though it is but fair to him to add that such lapses were usually followed by contrition and a day of uninterrupted work with doubling of his usual hours. Yet she was quite without anxiety for him on the ground of health, for he was evidently extremely well, and his slackening of interest (for it was no less than that) in the work which had hitherto absorbed him could not be put down to any loss of vitality in the functions of his brain, for side by side with it had come a marked quickening of interest in other things. So, wise woman as she was (though Mrs. Morrison had formed but a poor estimate of her mental grasp), she observed him silently and gleefully, not letting him suspect that he was observed, and followed and suited herself to his changing mood as carefully as she had suited herself to the previous regularity of his orderly life.

The eye that thus quietly and narrowly observed him was maternal, kindly, and humorous, and she noted these things as she might note the gradual recovery of some one she loved from a chronic complaint, which, though in no sense fatal or deadly, was crippling and limiting. He had ups and downs, of course, but to the professional and womanly eye it seemed that he was clearly on the mend, and one of the most essentially promising symptoms had been his sending of his book to Margery. This had to be elaborately explained to his mother, and carefully accounted for.

"The publishers have sent no fewer than a dozen copies,"

he said, "and I have had copies sent already to nearly everybody who I thought would care to have one, and the desire for information, however full, on ancient Alexandria is as rare as the taste for caviare. Is there nobody about I can send one to, as one sends game? Yet I cannot imagine Mrs. Morrison sitting down to the study of Ptolemies!"

His mother had not the smallest intention of suggesting the name which she believed would follow. It would be far better for him to come out with it himself.

"Frankly, I can't either," she said. "She would say. 'How it takes one back,' as she did when you told her the age of your Tanagras."

He was on to this instantly.

"Ah, you've hit it," he said. "My Tanagra shall have a copy."

Now that disposed of only one copy out of twelve, but she was not consulted further as to the fate of his other eleven, though she was to hear a little more about this one. He came back in a moment with a copy in his hand.

"It is rather a dull, dingy cover," he said. "One does not like to give a book so shabbily dressed. Would you not have it decently bound?"

"Certainly, I should," said she. "It is a very nice thought of yours. Margery will be delighted."

But he still lingered.

"Shall I write in it, and say whom is it from?" he asked. "'From the author'? Would that do?"

Mrs. Leveson was really guileful over this.

"I should write 'from her antique friend,'" she said. "That will carry on the little joke you had with her."

She saw him flush a little, and for one half-second he looked at himself in the big mirror over the fireplace. She could have kissed him for doing that; he was getting on wonderfully.

In the ten days that had elapsed between the sending of this gift to Margery and the visit of Mrs. Morrison lately recorded, he had scarcely alluded to the recipient at all, but, on the other hand, he had done practically no work whatever, and was idle, absent in manner, and preoccupied, which was all to the good. Again and again the impulse to bustle him, to assure him that he was on the right track, was almost irresistible; she longed to give him some psychic stimulant which should hurry on the rather sluggish functions of his heart. But she resisted this; it was his way, his nature, to go to work quietly and deliberately, making sure of each step, testing each stone, so that he should be in no danger of rearing an insecure superstructure. Yet, when the business on hand was no work of research, but a more fiery chase, it was hard to be patient with his deliberation. Still, it rendered him, as has been said, idle and preoccupied, and she possessed her soul in patience, though ardently desiring that he should not possess his.

But this evening after dinner he opened the subject, or, rather, the subject being opened in the course of conversation, he walked in, instead of staying outside.

"Any callers this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Morrison."

"Ah, I am glad I was not at home. It is so hard to say one is certain about anything, but I feel nearly sure I do not like her."

His mother laughed.

"I made up my mind for certain this afternoon," she said. "The answer is in the negative."

"Did she come alone?" he asked.

"Yes, Olive had a cold, she told me, and Margery, as we know, does not go out driving if she can possibly avoid it. Besides, Walter has come home; she will be in the seventh heaven."

"I like Walter," remarked Arnold, with an air of great fairness. "He is tremendously young without being a cub."

"Oh, every one is devoted to him," said his mother, cheerfully. "It is impossible to help it. What a good-looking boy, too."

And then Arnold walked in.

"Is Margery very fond of him?" he asked. "I don't ask without a reason."

"Ah, my dear, let us have your reason, then," said she.

"I suppose it will be a great surprise to you," he said, and she nailed an admirable surprise to her face, "but the fact is I have been thinking such a lot about Margery lately. I don't really believe I have thought about anything else. She has stuck in my mind, stuck fast. It is singular."

She leaned forward, upsetting her needlework-table. But she let it lie, and Arnold apparently did not notice the collapse, either. She hated that last sentence, "it is singular," with all the quiet determination of her nature, but the positive part of his speech quite outweighed that.

"Singular?" she said. "It is nothing of the kind. It is entirely natural. I want you to think of her till she blots the whole world out. My dear, the Egyptians are all very well, but turn your attention, as indeed you have been doing,

to an English girl for a change, a girl, too, as good as gold and as sweet as sunshine."

"Yes, that is her," said Arnold, making the most promising speech of his life.

"Then go to her, my dear. I wish you could go now and tell her so."

"Ah, but it is impossible. I am her antique friend. That is all. And there's Walter; probably she is in love with him. How dreadfully upsetting it all is: I can think of nothing else."

Mrs. Leveson was not a violent woman, but she could have boxed his ears for this timorous speech.

"Oh, if you are going to her with apologies," she said smartly, "for wanting to say anything, and with hopes that she is not in love with Walter, and fear that you are too old, you might as well stop at home. That isn't the language a girl loves to listen to."

He turned quietly toward her.

"Don't be impatient with me, dear mother," he said. "I want to be encouraged, you see."

"Yes, my darling, and it is just that which makes me so impatient. You mustn't want encouraging. You must make your own courage. It makes itself, if you only will allow it to. And, dear, when you come and tell me that Margery will be your wife, you will give me a greater joy than ever yet. And that is a great deal, dear. Because we have always been mother and son."

She said no more, being wise enough to stop after she had spoken her mind, and did not load him with repeated expressions of her pleasure. For repetition is often worse than

vain; it often undoes what has been well said. Not that she flattered herself she had said anything well; she had but spoken her thought, and even to let her mind go back to Mrs. Morrison's venomous communications of this afternoon or to speak of them to Arnold was like a descent into fog from some sunlit mountain air. She knew Margery, and that was enough for her; she cared not at all for what the girl's parentage was. The all-important thing was that her parents had given birth to this delicious girl.

It was late, and presently, after she went upstairs to bed, leaving Arnold committing the wild irregularity of smoking a cigarette in the drawing-room. As he had said, Margery had stuck in his mind, stuck fast, and though with a streak of academic reflection which his mother found rather trying, he thought this a singular thing, he was, in his manner, enraptured with the oddity. When first he saw her at that dull, decorous table of her aunt's, two years ago, he had been struck by the youthful grace of her, which had reminded him of his beloved Tanagra figurines, and for a while she was no more than that. Then, still in scholarly fashion, fantastically and artificially in the manner of the Theocritan poets, he had let his mind play with the idea; had in imagination decked her in Greek robe, given her a palm-leaf fan to play with, or thought of her standing, like the statue of which he had a cast, on tiptoe, ready for the race, with tunic shortened to her knee, and hair braided closely to her head. Then one day, not so long after, he had again met her in the woods in the course of an afternoon ride. She was hatless and was running down a grass path with delicious lightness and agility of motion; three or four dogs raced beside her, and

as she ran she was laughing and talking to them. Then suddenly she saw him, dropped to a sedater pace, and spoke to him shyly, radiantly. That meeting he recollected well, for it had supplied him with another image, Margery as Atalanta, the maiden of the woods, who gave no thought to men and their mysterious ways, but lived pure and cold apart with her hounds and her fleetness of foot, in the sunlight and shade of the virgin forests, a thing sexless and beautiful.

So far she had no real existence for him; he but reincarnated in her old and lovely legends; she was no more than a lay figure on which he hung the Greek draperies, a model which he made to act the myths and legends which he loved, and which were indeed more real to him than the tangible world in which he lived. And then, very slowly, very quietly, the change began; it was as if she refused to take part in his archæological fancies any more, but insisted on being merely herself, the girl who actually did live half a dozen miles away, who went out with real dogs and ran down the noiseless alleys of the wood, who, as he gradually learned, was palpitating with eager, tender life, alert and active. She emerged from the sunlit mists of antiquity and legend in which it had pleased him to place her, and became herself.

At first Arnold had been chilled and disappointed by this change. If she was not a charming embodiment of those gay and gracious figures, an Atalanta, a Theocritan shepherdess, a maiden of Tanagra, she was nothing to him. He turned his back on her, so to speak. But she did not go away, and so, before very long, he looked at her again. She had come to dwell in his mind, not as embodiment of his

fancy, but as herself. Often and often he had resented this; it had seemed to him an unwarrantable invasion of his privacy; she got between him and his work, a sentence which he was copying out would suddenly repeat itself in his brain said in Margery's voice, and Margery's laugh would make itself audible to his inward ear. It was a charming laugh, but he wanted to get on with his work, and he could not if she laughed at him. And then — for the poor fellow had lived all his life in books, and so at first his emotions, when they began to awake, had to use bookish ways of communicating with him — he invented a new game, and had imaginary dialogues, no longer with Atalanta and the Tanagra figure, but with Margery herself. They were cast in Theocritan mold, and she sang the praises of her dogs and animals, while he in answering sentences bade her look at the more exquisite shape of his Attic vase, the stenciled figures on his Eretrian lekythus, the noble beauty of the nymph's head on his Syracusan coin. It was still all very academic, but the step of progression was that he had admitted her, in her own person, to the study of the things he loved. Then came a further step, paramount in importance, for Margery came over to lunch one day, riding with Walter, and it became suddenly evident that there was no need to make these imaginary and unreal dialogues, for the thing became real. After lunch he had taken them both into his room, and Margery's eyes grew bright with the beauty he showed them, and even a little moist when he told her how they buried the figures with the dead, and that lying by the dry, dusty bones you would find these joyful images, that in a child's grave you would find models of toys, or of birds and beasts. She was

in tune with it all; she loved the lovely things, listened hanging on his words, looked with bright, tender eyes at what he showed her, whispered almost instead of speaking.

"Oh, Walter, look," she said once, "they put them in the graves. Oh, poor dead people with their lovely things." And when she went away that day after a prolonged inspection, "I simply can't thank you," she had said. "It's silly for me to try." And to his own surprise almost, he had found himself saying: "You can thank me if you like, and that is by coming again."

At that she had flushed a little, and looked at him shyly, eagerly.

"Oh, may I? May I really?" she said.

And after this he resented her reality no longer; he resigned himself to its coming between him and his work, for it was better to have it even there than not have it at all. He wanted it.

All this passed through his mind as he sat and smoked this unusual cigarette at this unusual hour, and quietly made up his mind as to what he should do. He would ride over to-morrow and ask her to be his wife. That was resolved. And then he permitted himself a flight of fancy. He imagined himself sitting at his study table, his books round him, his thoughts flowing freely and busily with some subtle piece of observation, verified and reverified, ready to be distilled from the point of his pen. And at that moment, so it seemed to him, the door opened, and he smiled to himself knowing who had opened it. He did not look up, and Margery came across the room and sat on the arm of his chair, not speaking or interrupting, but letting her hand lie

on his shoulder, while she followed what he was writing. And then soon after she spoke.

"Darling, that is quite delightful!" she seemed to say. "It is perfectly expressed, too. No, not one word more; you *shall* come out."

That seemed to him perfectly ideal. It is just a question, however, whether his mother would have thought it so.

Disturbed nights seemed to be somewhat in vogue just now, for, as we have seen, even Mrs. Morrison's profound and matchless repose had been broken the night before by the formation of her Machiavellian but happily futile schemes, though to-night, in proud, mistaken consciousness of her diplomatic successes, she slept like a top instead of behaving like one. But Walter and Margery both lay long awake, he lying very quiet and thinking entirely of her, she restless and tossing, thinking often and thinking with aching heart of him, but with further causes for unrest than that.

Her heart ached — ached for him. That scene on the high gravelly ridge above the pond had been bad enough when it occurred, but now it seemed more intolerably cruel. By the pitiless irony of fate it was she who was so very fond of him, who was selected to cause him this bitter unhappiness. It seemed to her that Walter could not have asked for anything but that, which she would have refused him, which she would not have given him gladly, exultantly, delighted that she could give him anything, who all these years had given her so much. But the one thing she could not give him was herself, for that was given elsewhere. The owner (poor wretch, as she had said that afternoon) did not know it was his, and there was no chance at all of that em-

barrassing knowledge ever reaching him. Indeed, at the mere thought of her preposterous secret being known to him, Margery grew hot and flushed, and shifted her uneasy head.

She was not ashamed of having this secret: it had been put into her heart from outside, without her choice. She seemed to have no control over the matter, or, now, any responsibility for it, except that it must never be betrayed. And, though for several months she had been conscious of it, it had flamed and flowered this afternoon only, and that when Walter declared his love for her. Then it flowered with flame, consuming, adorning her.

For a little she held it close, examining it, poring over it. From the very first, when Arnold had made those penetrating remarks about cats, she had seen that there was something finished, delicate, exquisite about him that she had never seen in man or woman yet. At first (and she smiled at the thought now) she had wondered whether it was real, whether it was no more than mere surface manner. Then gradually, partly by observation, partly by intuitive construction, she perceived, and perceived truly, that the finished manner, the crisp neatness of his speech, the sentences, each of which could be written in a book exactly as he spoke them, were faithful though superficial indications of the mind that moved behind and directed them. In comparison with him, Aunt Aggie with her streams of commonplace, Olive with her golf and her crochet, above all she herself, with her rude, rough vitality, were bumpkins and clod-hoppers. And as she came to know him better, the beautiful lucidity and perception of him grew ever more wonderful. Dull history grew iridescent with romance, dead

things lived, dry bones came together, and wonderful figures flowered out of the dim, shadowy past of the world, awakened by his touch.

And the very aloofness of him, that quality which somehow encircled him like a ring of ice or fire, attracted her also. The ordinary rough-and-tumble of life seemed not to come near him. Unconsciously and instinctively (again Margery was right in not attributing "pose" to him) he moved apart, and though he mingled with other people, spoke their language, ate their dinners, he was to her like some wonderful prince who chooses to be *incognito* and claims neither throne nor obeisances. And, perhaps, it was for that very reason in part that Margery came with her shy, secret incense. He had not asked it of her; therefore she gave it.

Margery, who lay warm in bed, was not there at all really. Romance, that enchanted land which lies everywhere and is built upon by every slum street, every tailor's shop, every grocery, every railway station, and requires only to be recognized to be real, had opened its golden gates for her, and she had passed through into true fairyland. Then suddenly — for such is the agitating custom of these parts — she was rudely and roughly hustled outside again, and the golden gate slammed in her face. In other words, her tiresome mind said to her: "What is to happen now?"

A very bad half hour was to happen in any case. She was back in bed, tired and horribly wide awake, with heart aching for Walter, and aching a little also for herself. Indeed, if Walter claimed and so lavishly received her pity and regret, she was no less worthy of it. He loved, she loved, and — and nothing was going to happen to either of them. They

had to bear it, and, if possible, grin. But the thought that they had to bear it together, here under the same roof, meeting all day and every day, became a future intolerable to contemplate. And all the time, even if they were successful in simulating a show of normal behaviour, in spite of Walter's secret that lay so heavy on her heart also, she had to bear the burden of her romance alone, to be forever trespassing into enchanted places, and forever being rudely thrust out.

And then the idea that had occurred to Aunt Aggie that afternoon, occurred also to Margery. Mrs. Morland, calling here not long before, had said she was wanting a governess for young children, and had in her comfortable, motherly way turned to Margery.

"I think I shall carry you off, dear," she said, "and shut you into the coal cellar till you promise to look after Gladys and Edith. They love you."

The thing, no doubt, had been but a joke, but as she tossed and turned, Margery wondered if it were possible that serious fact underlay it. It was much easier to imagine herself looking after those two children than living on here. It was hard for her, it was hard for Walter. She thought she could make him see that. The difficulty would be to convey such a new idea to Aunt Aggie without letting her know the reason for it.

So she tossed and turned. But Aunt Aggie didn't; she had already made up her mind, written her letter, and intended to speak to Margery next morning. She had even made a note on her engagement book: "Margery, 10:30." That would give her time to see the cook, as usual, at eleven.

All evening and late into the night the same difficulty had

been turning round and round in Walter's head. He knew well how sorry Margery was, and it was not reasonable to expect her to go on meeting him hourly, daily here. They would naturally be thrown much together, and he could guess from the way the evening had passed how great a strain would be continually put on her. Nor would it be easy for him; he saw that, also. And he, too, made his plan, to go away as soon as ever his birthday celebrations were over, and, on the plea of wanting to work, stop in London till his examination came on in a month's time. That would tide over the early and most difficult weeks. He felt, too, that he could not yet — unless it was necessary, or Margery wished it — tell his mother what had happened. There was no hand in the world which he could trust to touch that wound at present.

Unlike Margery, he lay very quiet, and with wide-open eyes watched the shadow of the window-bars cast by the moonlight outside fade as the moon sank in its setting behind the cedar that whispered from time to time as the night breeze stirred in its branches. Last night, even as now, he lay long awake, tingling with the thought that before another night came he would have told Margery. And he had let himself do more than hope what her answer would be; he had let himself, though wondering at so gracious a miracle — believe that she would take him. Who the other man was, he did not trouble to think, he did not care to know. A young man differently made than he might have felt he could not rest till he knew, and could give name to the hated rival. But it was not so with him; some fellow luckier than he had won Margery's heart, and — well, there was no more to be

said. He hoped he was a nice chap. But that he must be, since Margery loved him

And then the first faint chirrupings of waking birds sounded outside; tremulous, tentative notes. Night was not over yet, it was still dark, and no token of coming day yet was seen in the velvet sky, making the stars pale. The birds, after that little whisper of song, would sleep again till there came the new light from the East. And, tired out, hungry and empty of his heart's desire, yet without any bitterness, he slept too, head on hand, dreamlessly.

Margery found her task next morning unexpectedly and unaccountably simple. There had been no need for Aunt Aggie to send for her at half-past ten, since Margery had herself asked if she might speak to her, and since Mrs. Morrison had not quite made up her mind as to the easiest way to open the subject with the girl, she listened to what Margery had got to say first. There might be some peg therein, on which she could hang the subject of her own discourse. If not, she would just have to drive a nail in anywhere. Thus Margery's communication saved her the trouble of that exertion.

"I'm afraid you will think it very odd of me, Aunt Aggie," the girl began, "but — but I want to go away, please. Please don't think that I do not appreciate all your goodness to me, everybody's goodness, but I should so like to do something on my own account, be a governess. Please don't think it horrid of me."

Mrs. Morrison did not quite heave a sigh of relief, but this was certainly a very pleasant coincidence. As it was now quite certain that she would accomplish her own plans

without difficulty, since her plan was Margery's, she could easily afford to be critical and surprised.

"Dear me, what next?" she said. "What does this all mean, Margery? It is a very strange wish of yours."

"Yes, I know it sounds strange," said the girl, "but you have always told me I am very independent and restless. I only can't bear that you should think me ungrateful or unloving ——"

Margery's eyes suddenly filled with tears. She was tired with her bad night and overwrought with the strain of all those hours.

"It isn't that, dear Aunt Aggie," she said. "I have been awfully happy, thanks to you and Olive and Walter ——"

Her voice choked a little over this, but immediately she pulled herself together again.

"And it isn't for always," she went on. "If you will let me come back after a few months, I can't tell you how glad I should be. But I want a — a change, I think. The other day only, do you remember, Mrs. Morland said she was looking out for a governess; she said, probably half joking, to me that she wished I would come; I don't know if she meant it, but I do. I should like to go there for a bit. I will go as soon as possible, if you don't mind."

Now, the instant departure of Margery was exactly what Mrs. Morrison wished. She had felt fairly certain that, somehow or other, she could manage her departure, but she had been unable, on her own account, to see how it could be made immediate. But now Margery had, though quite unaccountably, asked for that. She was divided between curiosity as to the reason of it and joyful acquiescence. It

would be very nice if she could satisfy the one without abandoning the other. But if only — for her own sake — she had read and remembered the admirable fables of Æsop, and, in particular, that highly instructive one in which a dog, with a succulent chop in his mouth, sees in a pool the image of another dog with a succulent chop in his mouth, and tries to snatch it! The one was substance, the other but a shadow, a reflection. It was so with her; the chop of Margery's immediate departure was already in her mouth; her letter already written. But then curiosity, a mere shadow, a mere reflection, caused her to delay the devouring of what she had.

"I cannot see any reason for your so suddenly leaving us, Margery," she said, "and the servants and Walter and Olive would think it so odd. Mind, I do not oppose your going, your heart seems so set on it, that, though I might very justly feel hurt and grieved that you wanted to go, I do not say that I should forbid it. But this is a very sudden desire, and I think perhaps it is my duty to hear more of the reason ——"

Margery interrupted.

"Dear Aunt Aggie," she said, "it is just what I have told you. I want to go. I should like, above all things, to go to Mrs. Morland's, and unless I arrange at once she may get somebody else. I thought if you would just write a line to her, it might help me. I am so glad you don't object to my going, that you agree it may be a good thing. So why not at once?"

Curiosity was still unsatisfied, and Mrs. Morrison made what can be called a little sacrifice on the altar of Unveracity to gratify it.

"I do not see how I could write to her this morning," she said, "as I must see the cook at eleven, and, after that, I have to fit in different arrangements for the day." (This resolved into fact, meant that she would go out in the motor either at half-past two or three.) "But I might, perhaps, manage to write this evening when I come in, if you convince me that there is real reason for settling anything quickly."

(The foolish woman! The insensate spinning top!)

"But, dear Aunt Aggie," she said, "it is such a little matter. You agree that it would not be bad that I should go; I only want to go now. I can't explain; there is nothing to explain that — that can be explained."

There came a smart rap at the door. It was a rule in the house that Mrs. Morrison was not to be disturbed in the morning, and Walter, Olive, whoever it was that wished to see her, always made this knuckle apology. And Walter entered. Mrs. Morrison had already begun to answer.

"But the whole thing is so very sudden," she said. "And though I do not wish to stand in your way — come in. Oh, it is you, Walter — yet I think I ought to have some reason to give Mrs. Morland. Here is Walter now ——"

She ran into the very jaws of destruction, even though Margery gave yet another warning. But it was like some unlocalized foghorn; she did not know where it came from.

"Ah, don't ask him," she said.

Mrs. Morrison was not accustomed to pay any attention to Margery's remarks, and she paid none now.

"Here is a surprise for us all, Walter," she said "here is Margery wanting to go away and be a governess. I think she shows a very proper spirit in wishing to be useful and

earn her bread instead of everything being supplied for her. But such a hurry about anything I have never heard. And only yesterday I said how pleased I should be if Mr. Leveson would come over, at any time, and have a game of lawn-tennis; he and Olive, against you and Margery. I am sure it would make a capital match. But if Margery goes away at once — though I do not say that I am opposed to it — who is to make the four? I have not played for ever so long, and I should spoil your game. You and I would have no chance against Olive and Mr. Leveson. They would play so well together, for he is so nimble and she is so sure ——"

And then the poor lady felt she had lost her head. There was something going on — it was in the air — that she knew nothing of. These two quiet, silent young people confused her. They seemed almost unconscious of her presence, and she was accustomed to greater consideration. And at the moment her curiosity flared up, while she did not lose hold on the accomplishment of what she wanted.

"I don't lay any stress on that," she said, "because, of course, Margery could not have known that I had arranged those pleasant games of lawn-tennis, which I enjoy watching above all things, and since she wishes to go away and leave us, go she shall, and wild horses would not keep her here now. I do not say that I think she has been ungrateful for all that I have done for her, because I do not think that, and if I thought it I should say it. She shall go this very afternoon — Mrs. Morland will have received my letter by now, and I will follow it up by a telegram ——"

Mrs. Morrison suddenly saw she had made an error. She recollected — she was afraid — that she had said that such a

letter could not be written till evening, since she was so busy. Slightly perturbed by this, she looked up and caught Margery's eye, and wondered whether Margery was going to force her, by some inconsiderate question, to reconcile these singular statements. But Margery put no such question; she seemed unconscious of any inconsistency; she seemed to encourage, by her look, any further statements, so long as the trend of the talk was in favour of her scheme. But perhaps she had not noticed this inconsistency, so thought Mrs. Morrison. Margery was always rather stupid. Walter looked stupid, too, this morning. No doubt he was thinking about his birthday celebrations, and wondering if the fireworks would come off. Of course, April was of chance weather; it might be a wet night, and if rockets only fizzled. . . . She cannoned off a hundred objects, still wildly spinning, but the boy and the girl still sat undisturbed.

"A telegram," she repeated, with great distinctness. "I wish we had the telephone in the house, for it makes things so much easier. But I repeat that, though I offer no opposition, I think it very odd for Margery to be in such a hurry. I dare say she has good reasons, only I cannot conjecture what they are, though perhaps it is very stupid of me."

The words were spoken with a deeply sarcastic intention. Everybody knew she was not stupid at heart. Such an outrageous idea had never occurred to her, and she waited for a murmur of dissent. None came. Instead, what came to her was misgiving of a dreadful kind.

There had been silence when she finished her prattling speech. Neither Walter nor Margery seemed to be attending to her. Each looked at the other, quite gravely. And

then Walter shook his head, still looking at Margery. After that, he looked at his mother and spoke.

"It's odd," he said. "Because I came to see you in order to suggest that I should go away. I want to do some more work before I go in for my exam. I can't do it here; I should mean to, but I should always be riding and playing golf in spite of my intentions. So I shall go away after Tuesday, and stop in town for a month. And since you have asked me what I think about Margery's plan, I think it is dreadful nonsense."

He looked back at Margery.

"Awful nonsense, Margery!" he repeated. "What's the point?"

Into Mrs. Morrison's dull brain there slowly filtered a New Thought. It was dreadfully subversive; it implied a kind of unperceived earthquake. The earth, in fact, might conceivably have quaked, and she had not noticed it till it was all over. But, however painful it might be to her, she felt she was obliged to go into this, though it was like descent into a crater of a volcano not yet extinct.

"It is very strange," she said. "Both you and Margery want to go away at the same moment. It may be a mere coincidence. I hope it is. I know that coincidences are sometimes very striking and curious."

Walter looked at Margery again, and Margery at Walter. On Margery's part there was an almost imperceptible shake of her head, on Walter's an affirmative gesture. He still looked at her, after he had made it.

And then he turned to his mother again.

"I asked Margery to marry me," he said, "and she refused.

It was yesterday, yesterday afternoon. It will be uncomfortable — uncomfortable for both of us to stay here together just now. That was her thought, I know, though she told me nothing of it, and I knew it only because it was mine. We don't want to talk about it, either of us, to anybody else."

Mrs. Morrison rose to the occasion; she was almost sublime.

"Upon my word, Margery," she said. "These are pretty goings-on. Is this all the return I get for having lavished luxury and everything you could possibly wish for on you, all these years, that you must inveigle Walter into ——"

But Margery had had enough, and rose with a little shrug of her shoulders.

"Aunt Aggie," she said, "you have no right to say that to me. It is not true; but sometimes you seem not to know truth from lies."

Walter rose too.

"I think you had better apologize for saying that, mother," he said quietly.

"Oh, what does it matter?" said Margery. "Walter, I must talk to you about this. We will settle it together, Aunt Aggie."

But Walter did not move. His pleasant face looked very far from pleasant just then; it was set, frowning, determined. He shook his head.

"No; it does matter," he said. "My mother has said an outrageous thing to you. That must be retracted, and at once. It concerns me."

"Oh, as if I cared," said Margery.

Mrs. Morrison was not at all accustomed to being treated

like this. Walter's insistence was little to her taste, but somehow Margery's quiet contempt was harder to swallow. For contempt, of that there was no doubt, was at the root of Margery's unassumed indifference as to whether she apologized or not. But like many domineering people, she had nothing to back her supremacy up, when it was thus stubbornly challenged, and she fully and volubly broke down.

"Well, I am sure this is a great fuss to make about nothing," she exclaimed, "and I think it is but natural in me to express surprise when I find my only son has been making love all the time to his first cousin, a marriage of which I never approve, and to which I, for one, would never give my consent, and me with my head full of schemes for his happiness. But, of course, if I have said anything to hurt Margery's feelings, I am very sorry for it, especially when she has behaved properly in refusing, though I am sure, if this sort of conduct is honouring your father and mother, we had all have better been Turks or infidels. And it's all very upsetting, what with your coming of age, Walter, next week, and wishing to go away immediately afterward. Still I had no desire to hurt Margery's feelings, though no one seems to have any consideration for mine."

"Oh, it's all right, Aunt Aggie," said the girl.

As an apology this could scarcely be called handsome, but it would have to do.

"Thanks, mother," said Walter, "and now Margery and I will just talk this over. Shall we, Margery?"

They went together to Margery's sitting-room, where were all the tokens of their childhood, the picture of him drawn by her and framed by him, the four-legged table that only

used three of those useful members, and a hundred things more that reminded Walter of years that seemed suddenly to have died, to have been plucked away from the living stem of his consciousness so that they withered. But it was only for a moment that he looked silently round and then he spoke.

"Margery, dear," he said, "what shall we do? Would you rather I went away, or you? I meant, when I came into my mother's room this morning, to have my own way about it, and go myself. But if — if she allows herself to treat you like that, I see that perhaps you would rather go away."

"Oh, she doesn't mean anything," said Margery. "That doesn't matter. But, Walter, I am obstinate too, and I so dreadfully want to be able to — to do something for you, though it is such a little thing. I want *you* to say which you had rather do, and let us settle it like that."

He smiled.

"But we are arguing in a circle," he said. "All that I want is to do what you want. I can't help that. It isn't unselfish, so I don't flatter myself it's purely selfish. What you want will please me best."

Margery laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Oh, you dear, you dear!" she said. "I do like you so, and it does hurt so dreadfully, the whole thing, I mean, you and me."

He nodded at her.

"I wish I could take it for you," he said. "I know it hurts you awfully, and I am so sorry. I would so willingly take the whole lot of it, just because it would all be you.

But I can't. And I think perhaps we had better not talk about it. It doesn't help. We understand each other, you and I. It would be queer if we didn't."

He gently took her hands off his shoulders, for it was hard to bear them there, and sat down in the comfortable chair with the protruding tuft of horse-hair. The latter was very stiff and pricked his legs.

"What a disgusting chair," he said. "It looks as if it came from a pawnbroker's. You must have a new one. And the carpet's in rags. Well, Margery? You see, personally I don't care two straws what I do. I can't choose between two indifferent things. It makes no difference at all to me if I go to town or stop here."

Margery walked up and down the room again in silence.

"I think I'll go then, dear," she said. "It is only reasonable Aunt Aggie should wish you to be here, and — and I think she would absolutely hate me if I stopped here, and let you go. Hatred isn't nice, either for the hater or the hated. But I don't see how she could help it. And if only Mrs. Morland will have me, I shan't at all dislike it, and the children are dears."

Margery sat down on the window-seat, and propped her head in her hands, resting them on the sill. Like Walter, she felt that the decision was of infinitesimal importance; nothing mattered, except that he was unhappy, and that she could do nothing for him. And he was so good, so gentle, so patient, which made her impotence to do anything for him the more unsupportable. And though she tried hard not to cry, she felt her eyes filling.

"Good; then we'll settle it like that," said he. "Shall

I go and tell my mother? It hasn't taken us long to arrive at our decision."

She could not answer, and he came across the room, guessing why she was silent, and stood behind her, a yard away or so.

"Margy, dear," he said. "I can't bear that you should grieve. If you want to help me, buck up a bit yourself."

She turned round to him, and, though her throat felt tight and choking, she managed to smile.

"Yes, I will," she said. "Oh, Walter, Walter; God bless you!"

And at that he turned quickly and left her.

CHAPTER VII

MARGERY sat a while longer at the open window letting the breeze of this bright April day blow in upon her, ruffling her hair, and laying the touch of its cool freshness on her cheek. Before long Walter crossed the lawn outside with a rapturous dog or two in attendance, going down apparently to the farm, which they had not visited in their walk yesterday, and at sight of him the joy of being loved, that noblest craving in any nature, man's or woman's, and the pain which here was so indissolubly bound up with it, strained and pulled at her heart. But how rapturously would she have sacrificed the one, if its withdrawal could have healed the other; how gladly could both be expunged, would she have called to him, bidding him wait, so that they might go for a prowl together. But now all that was impossible: for she had understood very well the impulse that just now made him loose her hands from his shoulders. It was inevitable, she supposed; that was the miserable part about it. Loving, he could not bear the little instinctive sign of mere comradeship from her. And for such reasons he had better take his prowl alone.

It was no good, anyhow, to idle here, letting her mind dwell on these aching topics. Besides, he had told her to "buck up," and to employ herself, she supposed, was one of the most obvious ways of doing so. And yet it did not seem worth while to practise, nor to read Goethe's Faust, a task

which she had set herself to accomplish before Easter. What was she to do?

And then her eye fell on that volume bound in white vellum, which her "antique friend" had sent her. Though it had been here a week, and she had read every day in it, she was not more than half way through it, for those lucid yet decorated periods required to be read closely, and often reread, for there was not only the sense that they conveyed to be assimilated, but the music of the words to be listened to. Never had she read English quite like it; it needed to be read aloud before it could really be appreciated, and often she read so to herself, letting the ear feast on its sentences, not being content to leave them to the cold, insensitive judgment of the eye only. And yet this morning, somehow, she hesitated before opening it; it seemed cruel to Walter; it seemed as if she did not care. Yet that was fanciful, fantastic, a meaningless piece of sentimentality.

Margery opened the book, and at once found the place where she had stopped, though it was in the middle of a paragraph, for the beginning of it was familiar to her, part of her almost, and the end a stranger still. How far it was the mere beauty of the writing which so enchained her, how far the fact that it was immensely individual in character, and spoke to her so strongly of the writer, that sometimes she fancied she could almost hear his voice in it, she did not know. Certainly, she was very conscious of the writer when she read. It was fine, exquisite, delicate, so far removed from the ordinary humdrum, that she seemed to be sitting high above clouds; enjoying existence brilliantly. Brilliant; that was the word; life was sublime. It might, as far as experience

went (as far as hers went, in any case), be unreal, but as she read, it sounded more real than her room, herself, her trouble.

And she read:

"Theocritus completely realizes this, makes it real. There is no doubt possible; he makes it exist, as an artist must, so that while we read, the imperfect of frost and snow, and tumult and worry is less than a half-remembered dream. Only the shepherd lad pipes, the girl listens, and her flock grazes unheeded round her. That bold one, the sire of so many, still crops the grass; the rest seek shelter from noonday underneath the shadow of circular stone pine, or where the oleander thicket is on fire with blossom. In such thicket she too has hidden herself, bright of eye, burning of heart, and the starry flowers throw starry light on to her bare arms and flower-like face. Corydon, his herd also straying and unheeded, sits on a boulder underneath the pine, and a goat from his herd spars with a ram, and he throws his crook-handled stick to separate them. He knows not whose is the other flock, and little he cares; with hands clasped round entwined knees, he begins crooning to himself some love-song of shepherds and the mountain-side. Yet he has not got the words correctly, the lazy boy, brown-shouldered and smooth-chinned. He chants the old tune awry, with the word Amaryllis spoiling the dactyl of the song. Again and again it is Amaryllis, and it was Amaryllis who crouched in the shade of oleander, star-sown with the reflection of its starry flowers. And then the long-lashed eye of him turned, catching a tremor in the bushes, unusual to the windless noonday, and, 'Amaryllis,' he said again, and the rhythm of the song was entirely broken, but the rhythm of his love was sweetly in tune with the beat of her tremulous heart. And soon with fingers entertwined . . ."

Somehow he, or Theocritus, or the combination of the two, struck a chord not in Alexandria, nor two thousand years ago, but struck it here and now. Margery was not a sentimentalist, but she was young, and the youth of her cried out, hailing its companion, loving it across two thousand years, if need be. It was she who sat in the starry-flowered shade of the oleander, she, her heart, stirred there, when Amaryllis's name was called. Who called it? No, not Theocritus nor even that Corydon, but he who made Corydon live to her.

She turned the page, and read on, speaking the words in a low whisper, so as to better catch their music.

"There is no artist, no painter of landscape, who with all the colours of the palette can make canvas glow with such noonday luminance of the South land. The skies of the incomparable Claude even are not so blue as the vault which with two magical words Theocritus has spread for us above the stone pine on the hills of Greece, and which reflected in the starry oleander-blossoms, stains the fair, soft neck of maiden crouching there. In two words, he paints that sparkling canopy of azure, a great wash of purest ultramarine, and then with delicate stenciling brush gives us exquisite detail, tells us how cunningly was carved the head of the shepherd's crook which Corydon, with one sweep of that beautiful sun-browned arm, throws to separate the goat and sparring ram. He had fed them in the ripe thickets by the stream that morning, and had plucked those tendrils of the clinging ivy with wine-dark clusters of berries, which he had turned into a chaplet and laid, all cool and dewy, on his comely locks. . . ."

Some one had come into the room as Margery read, but he

had to give a discreet little cough to take her attention off her book.

"Oh, yes, Frank, what is it?" she asked, still sweetly wandering in her wits. Frank, the second footman, was rather a friend; he was nice to animals.

"Mr. Leveson wants to know if he can see you, miss?" he said.

"Oh, yes; I'll come down. Is he with Mrs. Morrison?"

"No, miss. He's waiting at the front door on his horse. He asked if you was alone."

Now, there was no girl in the world less of a flirt than Margery, none, either, less likely to imagine vain things. But it is a fact that at these impassive words (Frank had a face like a hatchet and a voice of wood) her heart suddenly beat. That was a thing beyond her control; it was silly of it, but, so to speak, it had nothing to do with her. She quite disowned the ridiculous organ, which beat without anything whatever to beat about.

"Then please bring him up here, Frank," she said, for that seemed the simplest thing to do.

The man left the room, and Margery got up from her seat, leaving the book there. Had she been a little less simple, it might have occurred to her to shut it, perhaps to put it away, and had such a thought entered even into the remotest corner of her brain she would have done so. But she no more thought of doing that than of looking at herself in the glass to see if she was tidy, or of throwing anything over the protruding tuft of horsehair. Calculated "coquetry" — to use a dreadful word quite suitable to a dreadful thing — might have left her to behave exactly as she behaved, and to

have left the book where it was, and not mind how she looked. But here extremes met; she did exactly what the coquette would have done, just because she was so different. Simplicity affected can be the most artful of tools; but it is an error to suppose that it cannot be natural.

They shook hands, and he looked quickly round the room with those very tranquil eyes. The whites of them looked as if something dark underlay it; it was the transparent white of plovers' eggs.

"I like this room," he said quietly. "And you haven't shown it me before. It looks like a room that belongs to a person; not a room that belongs to the housemaid who dusts it, and puts things in their places."

Margery laughed.

"You mean it looks very untidy," she said, "but you say it very kindly. You rode over?"

"Yes, I rode fast. You guessed I rode? I am out of breath and untidy. But you also put it very kindly. May I look round your room? Please let me; you looked round mine. I know I shall like yours."

It was true that he seemed a little out of breath; Margery had not noticed it till he suggested it himself. And then it occurred to her that, for the first time, she saw some agitation underlying his manner. And then she remembered again, with a heart that beat foolishly, ridiculously, that he had asked to see her alone. At that some sort of embarrassment seized her, and she spoke, hearing her own voice say things that even as they were said sounded unlike herself. But she scarcely cared.

"You will find nothing but silly relics," she said, "things

that Walter and I played with. We made that table, for instance, but be gentle with it. And I did that absurd portrait of him, and he made the frame for it. We could never decide which of us it belonged to. The canary is mine; he stuffed it, and so badly. There are bits of wadding coming out of its beak."

He had followed those objects with his eye, as she mentioned them. And then he saw the book that lay open on the table.

"I hope that is not a relic, too?" he said.

Margery suddenly found that her tongue stammered.

"N-no," she said. "I was reading it when you came in."

"And it doesn't bore you?"

"Ah, how c-could it? It is so beautiful. I never can thank you enough for sending it me."

And then by an effort she banished the unusual stammer.

"I haven't read it all yet," she said, "because I have to read it slowly. It is quite lovely. Wouldn't it have been nice to have been alive then?"

He had walked as far as the table, and at that moment he turned back toward her again, shutting the book that lay open by a quick, nervous movement.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I have lost your place."

"Oh, but it doesn't matter," said she. "I always know where I have got to."

Then came the great, sublime, common moment.

"Don't read any more," he said, "until we read it together. Do you see? Not that we shall ever read the silly thing. But together."

Margery looked at him, standing quite still.

"You and me?" she said.

"Yes."

Margery suddenly felt as if all the power and force of her strong young body left her. Her knees shook, her hands trembled, and she sat, or rather collapsed into the chair that stood beside her. But that lasted but a second, and next moment she looked up at him, with yearning and love streaming from her eyes from her to him, in a luminous torrent. She knew nothing except that he stood there, waiting for her reply, still a little breathless. All else was gone for that moment — ancient Alexandria, Walter even. And then she held out both her hands to him, giving him the answer for which he waited.

Then after a little while there began that talk which, though it has been repeated a million and a million times, is always new, and never quite the same, when for the first time two hearts are bared to each other, and two souls meet; when Adam awoke from his sleep in the garden of the Lord, and found that there had come to him a woman. It was so with Arnold now; never had woman come to him yet, she and the glory and the mystery that her unveiling makes but the more mysterious; all his life had been passed in deep sleep, and now when he awoke on this morning it was Eden indeed, and the new presence, beautiful, bewildering, stood by him. And not less so to her was this moment of awakening, for she awoke to find what she had dreamed of was true. Eager and vivid, according to her nature, as had been her dreams, they were of stuff that now vanished like mist. She had dreamed of the beautiful mind which had revealed itself in the pages that she pored over, but even that was unsubstantial now

when the man himself, body and mind and soul alike, was close to her, with her alone, in the shabby, sunlit room that was hers, telling her that his awakening had come. And yet it was scarcely credible that it was he who really, actually spoke, that it was she to whom he spoke.

"Oh, I know how poor the gift is," he said, "and how royal a gift I take in exchange. But I can do no more than give you myself, dedicate myself, and I suppose one should not feel ashamed when one gives all. And, such as it is, it has never been pilfered or borrowed from yet. My heart is a chamber that none have entered yet; you are the first to cross the threshold. Lock the door after you, Margery. None other shall come in."

To Margery this seemed the perfection of human utterance; she did not know that words could be so sweet. But it is a question whether a listener or critic, had there been one, would have found them so flawless. They were a shade too literary for the occasion; not a word was out of place, not a syllable was stammered over. His joy, which was genuine, did not at all choke his utterance, the sentences came out with admirable smoothness. Again the hypothetical critic might have taken exception to the subject of the polished period, for, coldly considered, it was all about himself and his heart, and though it was very proper that he should feel the inadequacy of it, he need not have been so insistent on the point, seeing that he was talking about himself. But it was no wonder that Margery found perfection there, for it was about him; about nothing else did she wish to hear. She would not, woman though she was, have been so wrapped and enfolded in the feeling of what love meant if he had

spoken of her perfection instead of his own shortcomings and unworthiness. His manner, too, well fitted his discourse. He had kissed her just once, and then knelt on the ground beside her chair, holding one of her hands clasped against his breast. Yet he was not in the least posing; finished, he might be called, but that was his nature.

"Oh, I can't bear you to say that to me," she said, "to speak like that of yourself, when you know, oh, you must know, that you give me the best and most beautiful thing the world contains. And it came as — as such a surprise, though heaven knows how ready I was. Do you remember the first night you dined here? I had an awful cold, and had my shoulders wrapped up in a shawl like an old woman in an almshouse."

He smiled at her.

"Yes, yes; oh, so like an old woman in an almshouse, you wonderful Tanagra figure."

"I? You are laughing at me already. But you mustn't, because it is all serious. You talked about cats, and I saw how you understood. It is everything to understand. Oh, antique friend! What a lot you have taught me before I ever really knew you. I don't now, even, you know. Tell me about you. All the bad things you can think of. Don't you love a person's weaknesses and bad points, if you very much like the person, I mean, almost more than their good points? It is the bad points that are so darling."

He laughed; this might be nonsense, but it was adorable nonsense.

"That is too much to ask just yet," he said, "when it is

still so important that I should make a good impression. You might not like my bad points at all."

Margery shook her head at him, tremulous-mouthed.

"I'm afraid you haven't got any," she said. "Can't you think of one?"

"Well, if you insist. I am a coward, I am conceited, I am jealous ——"

"That will do to start us. Coward, tell me about your cowardice."

"I was deadly afraid of coming here this morning. I was frightened to death at the thought of telling you."

Margery's eyes dwelt on his softly, tenderly.

"Oh, dear. This won't do at all. It is the biggest bravery to be afraid of a thing, and yet do it. Let's try the next. Conceited? What about?"

"That silly book on the table, for instance. How conceited I was the day I sent it you. I thought: 'Now she'll see that the poor old antique friend does know something about something, and can, to some extent, express what he knows.'"

"Ah, that was conceit," said Margery softly. "It is so clear to me, though I have only read half of it, that you know nothing, nothing, and record your ignorance so awkwardly, so unintelligibly. Shall I read you the paragraph I was reading when you came in, to convince you? 'He had fed them in the ripe thickets by the stream that morning, and had plucked those tendrils of clinging ivy with wine-dark clusters of berries, which he had twined into a chaplet and laid, all cool and dewy, on his comely head.' That was as far as I got. And then you came."

A sudden ardour, more human and simple than any he had felt yet, tingled through him as she spoke the words he had written, and he took the hand of hers that he still held and kissed it.

"You set them to the music of your voice," he said. "I am proud of those halting sentences, without conceit."

"Jealous?" she said.

"Yes, I have been jealous of that delightful cousin of yours, who I hear has just come home. Why, what is the matter, my dearest?"

For Margery had risen suddenly, almost snatching her hand away from him, and gave a little low cry of distress.

"Ah, I had forgotten, I had forgotten," she said. "How wicked and selfish I am! And yet, how could I help it? You came, and there was no room left in my mind for me to remember anything else."

"But what is it?" he asked.

"Walter, poor darling Walter. He — he proposed to me yesterday, only yesterday, and I was so sorry. Indeed, I was; I lay awake half the night, tossing and turning, and aching for him. And it all went from my mind when you came! I do not deserve such a friend. And my plan, too, what is to happen to that?"

For one moment a sort of spasm of self-congratulation, almost complacent, held Arnold. It was wholly natural; it was almost inevitable. Then Margery's evidently keen distress engaged him again, and he found, after a single second's thought, an elaborately felt thing to say about it.

"Lovers are supposed, even allowed to be, selfish creatures," he said. "And, dear me, it seems very reason-

able that they should be. What else could you expect if they all feel as we do? But you, with the tenderest heart in all the world, are not thus. Even now you can think of him, with distress and aching. You make me ashamed to do less. I am sorry, too. How could I not be when I know what he has missed?"

These admirable reflections failed, for the moment, to console Margery.

"And he is so good and gentle," she said piteously, "and I am so fond of him. You don't know what he has been to me all these years."

"I guess what you have been to him," said he, "and so I am sorry. And your plan? What plan was in your wise little head?"

Margery looked at him a second, with the sunlight and rapture of the present moment bursting through these soft tender clouds.

"I don't know that you will like my plan very much," she said, "and I don't know that I like it either, now. You see, it was clearly better for one of us, after yesterday, to go away, and we settled, he and I, that I should take a place as a governess ——"

"I do not approve of that plan," said Arnold. "Was it his?"

"Ah, no! The dear boy had already made up his mind to go away and live in town, in order to get out of my way. It was I who made him give it up and adopt my plan. He had no thought for anything but me. You see, Aunt Aggie would not have liked his going, and, after all, it is his home. The idea was I should go to the Morlands', whom I like very

much. I should have been very happy there. I was expecting to go to-morrow, or the next day, as soon as could be managed."

Margery at first, when the great thing happened, had forgotten Walter; then, quite as soon as could be expected of what Arnold had called (though he knew not with what truth) the tenderest heart in the world, she had remembered him; now — a third phase — remembering Walter she entirely forgot herself, remembered nothing but Walter. The great thing, love, and all the sweet future of it, was already quite safe, enshrined, and all the affection and the dear ties of her former life were not weakened, but strengthened by it. If it had been a former habit to be kind and tender, especially with all that was ailing and suffering, the habit now had a double potency, the instinct became more overmastering.

"Yet what else is there to be done?" she continued. "I cannot, I simply cannot, let Walter know just yet the tremendous thing that has happened. It is a cruelty of which we cannot even think. And if suddenly he finds my plan has changed altogether — for it was but an hour ago we settled it all, here in this room — he will know something has happened. He knows already there is some one else, I told him that, though I did not say who it was. Nor did he ask me."

Arnold — it was not reasonable to suppose that his æsthetic perceptions should suddenly atrophy, because Margery had accepted him — could not help asking a question, in order to see Margery's beautiful instincts deal with it.

"Why did you not tell him?" he asked.

She looked at him with head a little on one side, as if in wonder whether he spoke in jest. Surely he must have.

"You are teasing me merely," she said, "for you know that you are asking me one of the big, simple things to which there is no answer, except that they are so. How could I speak of you to him? You know that."

Yes; it was enchanting, as enchanting as the mirror of water which must reflect the sky. Even his question had not ruffled it; no shattering of the image had passed to trouble it. And she went on with the same childlike simplicity.

"And I can't tell him now," she said. "And if I don't go away, as we settled, he must see that something has happened. And I am so bad at concealing what I feel; I leak somehow. I must go, I think, and, for a few weeks, cannot this be our secret? I should like nobody to know. I don't want it shared yet by any one; it would seem to take a bit of it away from me."

Margery looked troubled for a moment.

"Here am I, mixing my selfish self up with it all again," she said. "I like it, love it to be our secret for selfish reasons. But, indeed, the other reason exists, that of not telling Walter just now, for his sake. I thought of that first, too. I did, really. And there I go again, excusing myself."

How enchanting she was! All his life he had lived in dead things, in the records and the achievements of ages long past, and now, here to-day, here was his incarnated Tanagra, who loved him, making real, bringing into life all that before had been but clay figures and manuscripts. All the hiatuses, all the life that had to be conjured into these things by force of

imagination, was being realized without effect. He only had to look and listen, to allow himself to feel.

"Besides," said Margery, suddenly becoming hugely practical, "if Mrs. Morland takes me I shall be next door to you. You won't have to ride over and get hot. Oh, dear, I hope you won't catch cold — and I shan't have to sit in the silly motor and drive for miles and miles. Aunt Aggie, too — oh, if you are a coward — only I proved you were not — what am I? What will she say when she knows? And your mother? I forgot her; I forgot everything but you."

Margery laid a timid hand on his; it was the first spontaneous caress she had offered, and the very shyness, the tentativeness of it was deliciously in keeping with his ideal. She was coming to life (such was his thought) graciously, tenderly, diffidently. And to an Epicurean in sensation, every emotion was tinged with Epicureanism; he loved the thought of the temporary secrecy, the intrigued visits. Yet his next words were perfectly sincere.

"You must not keep me waiting too long," he said, "if I consent to your plan. And my mother must not be kept waiting at all. I told her last night of my hopes, yes, and of my fears, also. But she will forgive Walter now. This morning she came to the gate and bade me God-speed. If — if it were not for leaving you I should long for my return to her. There is only one person better and dearer than a man's mother."

"Then do you agree, for Walter's sake?" she asked.

"I don't care a straw about Walter's sake," he remarked. "But I agree, for yours, if you wish it. But it is only if Mrs. Morland's children are the ones in question. If you propose

to go farther away than Ballards, I should take my courage in my hands, since you say you are a coward, and write a concise note to Walter. And — and haven't we had enough talk about arrangements? The thing that has arranged itself surely calls for recognition."

Not with Walter's roughness and unthinking violence, but with gentle pressure, he drew her to him, and again kissed her. But Margery's heart had taken command of her, and it was she who returned his kiss with quick, trembling lips, and hands that laid close fingers on his.

"And you must go," she said, "but you take me with you. Aunt Aggie often asks for me to go out with her before lunch. She takes a little walk. I must go with her, if our plan is to succeed, and I shall at the same time ride with you. And kiss your mother for me, too, will you?"

For the third time he kissed her.

"Like that?" he said quickly.

"No, that is for me; it is mine. I used to smother my mummy when I kissed her. Anything did; her hair, her neck, anything."

"And when will you come and smother mine?" he asked.

"Oh, I long to; as soon as is possible. Does she really like me?"

"She does. I am jealous again."

"No, don't be," said she; "I want a mother, too. I haven't had one for eight years."

Margery shook her head at her own words.

"Though Aunt Aggie *is* so kind to me," she added.

Any one so sensitive as he could not fail to catch the conscientiousness of this addition, and a man less perceptive of

nuance might have spoken directly on the subject. His course, however, was steered to a hair-breadth. It implied the knowledge that Aunt Aggie was not wholly maternal, without suggesting it. Also it gave a certain light touch to the perceived situation.

"Too many mothers spoil the broth," he said. "Mine is excellent at soup. Please taste it soon."

He could scarcely help knowing how clever that was; to Margery there was no cleverness at all about it; it was simply that he understood, which is, after all, a function more of the heart than the brain.

"Many, many helpings," she said. "More than Oliver Twist."

They went down together, reaching the hall without detection. The front door was open, and just outside was his horse with hatchet-faced Frank patiently holding its bridle. And then as they lingered but one moment longer the door of Mrs. Morrison's sitting-room opened, and out she came with no less than three completed letters in her hand.

"Mr. Leveson!" she said. "Why, what a pleasure; and you have come over to lunch, as I hoped you would, and have a game of lawn-tennis afterward? Olive, dear, here is Mr. Leveson" — this was called over her shoulder into the sitting-room — "come over to lunch and a game of lawn-tennis. I hope the net is up and they've marked out the court? Margery, is the court marked out? I always trust to you for that. Perhaps you have been forgetful, but it doesn't matter, dear, and you can lend Mr. Leveson some golf sticks, and I'm sure Olive has improved so that she will give him a capital match. Olive, you must show Mr.

Leveson all those strokes that the marker has taught you. I'm sure you hop over the bunkers as well as anybody. I often had half a mind to learn it myself. I am sure it looks very easy, though one never can tell till one has tried. It is just the day for a game of golf. Before lunch let us all go for a little stroll in the garden. I want Olive to show you the place I have planned for a rock-garden, Mr. Leveson, and ask your advice, though I do not know that I shall venture there myself, as it is so damp. But Margery and I will see what wants to be done on the terrace. If you leave gardeners to themselves they do nothing but put in sticks. Margery, will you run and fetch my hat? Bellairs will be at her dinner, and it is scarcely worth while to disturb her. She is sure to have put it out; and two pins, dear — long ones; and perhaps the little gray cape. You will easily find it."

Margery had said she was a coward, and she incontestably proved the truth of her assertion by the alacrity with which she went to find the hat and the two pins and the little gray cape, leaving Arnold to manage his own affairs. And her cowardice was endorsed by her subsequent behaviour, for though she "easily found," as Aunt Aggie had said, not only the little gray cape, but the pins — long ones — and the hat, she deliberately waited upstairs till an extra minute or two had elasped so that Arnold might escape or not, as he chose, from these nets baited with lunch and golf and Olive. And really, it was not humanly possible not to smile a little over Aunt Aggie's nets. They were so very patently spread, they were made of good stout material, and Aunt Aggie "shooed" the quarry into them, pointing out, so to speak, exactly where they were, so that he should not by any chance run in the

wrong direction. The little victim, in fact, was completely conscious of the door prepared for him; it was only the victimizer who was unconscious of hers.

Arnold had been polite, but quite firm; he had absolutely no intention of staying to lunch, and, when Margery got back with the hat and the little gray cape, was saying for the eighth or ninth time that he must be getting back. Simultaneously Mrs. Morrison gave up, and called into her sitting-room:

"You needn't interrupt your crochet, Olive; Mr. Leveson cannot wait to see the rock-garden. But I shall take a turn with Margery. You shall show him the rock-garden and your new strokes at golf another day."

Margery strolled out through the front door with him, to where his horse was being held, and while he put on his gloves he spoke low to her.

"Mrs. Morrison has been wondering what we found to talk about," he said. "I think she will ask you direct questions. Had I not better tell her?"

"Oh, Arnold, to-day?" she said.

"Yes, her only, of course. Otherwise she may worry you. I think it is best, if you don't mind."

Margery's face displayed blank and dismayed forebodings.

"Oh, you *are* brave," she said, "but I will tell her if you like."

"No, dear, it is for me."

He left the hatchet-faced Frank again holding his horse, and went straight back into the hall. Mrs. Morrison had got the little gray cape on, and one pin was already adjusted.

"Ah, you think better of going away?" she said. "Delightful. Olive — Mr. Leveson ——"

"I must not wait long," he said, "for my mother is expecting me. But may I accompany you on your little stroll? I should like to have some conversation with you."

"You can go on with your crochet, Olive," said she. "Mr. Leveson is not waiting for lunch."

Mrs. Morrison was not, as has been said, an imaginative woman, and in general she was a stranger to forebodings, though when anything untoward happened she often said afterward that she had felt it coming all along. But to-day as they went out on to the cedar-shaded terrace she had a foreboding of a most unpleasant nature, and the feeling was so new and uncomfortable that she wondered if she had eaten anything that disagreed with her. Perhaps it was only the agitation of her talk with Walter and Margery. Of all possible causes she preferred that it should be that — of all possible causes she least preferred that which seemed to her possible. But she did not fail in her ordinary volubility; she must not appear otherwise than calm.

"And I'm sure it's a great pleasure to have a talk with you, Mr. Leveson," she said, "for I often say one gets so little real conversation nowadays. Dear Olive is often very silent; sometimes I think she must have something on her mind, but, if there is anything I always avoid doing, it is forcing a confidence, however gently. No one has ever said of me that I intruded into private affairs, though it is wonderful how many people tell me their secrets."

This seemed to be a favourable opening, and he ran in.

"I am going to add to their number," he said. "In a word, I have proposed to Margery, and she has consented to make me the happiest of men."

The foreboding had come true, though it had seemed almost too bad to be true. All her nets had been spread in vain, and in vain, too, had been her delicate tissue of variegated falsehoods to this man's mother yesterday. It was the most dreadful blow — a blow, so she thought (though she could not possibly say why) of a treacherous nature, struck at her from the dark. And it seemed to throw a new and lurid light on Margery's character. There was something, it appeared, about the girl that drew men on, lured them in, which probably she inherited from her mother. It seemed scarcely possible that within twenty-four hours any girl of proper modesty could have received two offers of marriage, both, from Mrs. Morrison's point of view, so highly unsuitable. It was bad enough to hear about Walter's infatuation, though perhaps Margery had done her best to repair the effects of her fatal insidiousness by refusing him. But this was almost worse, and infinitely more atrocious was her conduct now, for she had been so lost to any sense of shame as to accept this man.

And then her mean, narrow mind saw another point of view; though her schemes (if you could call a mother's natural hopes for the happiness of her only daughter, scheming) had all given way, still if Mr. Leveson did not intend to marry Olive, it was better that he should marry Margery, than take all his property and wealth and prospective title, and share them with a girl who meant nothing to Mrs. Morrison. Now, Margery's conduct was no less base, her insidiousness had undergone no palliation, but schemers (so said the poor confused lady to herself) usually get their way in this wicked world, and since Margery had schemed

and got her way, it would be pessimistic (a thing she detested) to shut one's eye to the silver lining of this abominable cloud. It was bitter, bitter as a pill, that Olive should not become the future Lady Northwood, but it was absurd to scrape off the gilding — the fact that her niece was going to enjoy that enviable position — in order to be nauseated at the naked bitterness of the pill. And after all, Margery had "let Walter off" (this was how her thought phrased itself), and that was something, though what a man — still less two men — could find in her, entirely passed her aunt's understanding. Perhaps she had let Walter off, because she knew what was coming.

All this, and much more, passed through her head with the instantaneousness of impression. His news had been like the opening of a sluice-gate on a river full of flood-water, and it took no time at all for this collection of miscellaneous objects of thought to pass through in a turgid flood. It was not that she was quick in matters of thought; it was merely that the sluice-gate had been opened so very wide, and there was such an extraordinary collection of *débris* ready to pass through. And her answer which followed the announcement, came at once in the confused fashion of her thoughts following the trend that has been indicated, following also the ineradicable commonness of her mind, which in general was cloaked by her conventionality.

"Well, Mr. Leveson," she exclaimed, "and so that's the end of all I have thought about, though I'm sure I always kept it to myself, so long. It was no wonder that you didn't seem to jump at the rock-garden, if your thoughts were running elsewhere, and it quite explains, though I am glad to

think I asked for no explanations, what you and Margery talked about for so long this morning — I wish you all happiness, since that is your choice, and as I concealed nothing, nothing from your mother yesterday, I am quit of all responsibility. I hope Margery may make you a very good wife, and that your relations will be pleased. I am not thinking of the inconvenience to myself at all, though if ever there was a careful letter written to any one, it was the letter I wrote to Mrs. Morland yesterday, recommending Margery as governess to her younger children, hoping that she would be indulgent, and remember what her early years had been. Of course, if I had known what you now tell me, I might have spared myself the pain of writing at all, since it is not to be expected that Margery will take a situation now, however suitable. I suppose it means that Walter will go away after his birthday, though it is six months since I have set eyes on him, because it's only right to tell you that he wanted to marry Margery, too, who, I am sure, must have something very attractive about her, though for years I have tried to see it, without very much success, since it seems that everybody is after her. Poor Walter, I am sorry for him, since one always wants everybody to get what he desires, though troubles, as I shall certainly tell him, are often blessings in disguise, for I know Margery pretty well by now. It isn't that I don't wish her well, and wish you well, and I believe Northwood is a very beautiful place, Elizabethan, I should think from *Country Life*, but there it is. We must only be thankful that things are no worse, but it is but right to tell you that she is absolutely penniless, though Walter was thinking of settling something on her, which no doubt he will

not do now, when he knows. But I have no desire, except to be friendly with you, and to think that Margery is a very lucky girl. Who would have imagined that a child I picked up from the slums — I assure you no less than that, orange-peel in the gutter and all, with a barrel-organ on the day her mother lay dead in the house, for I remember it as if it happened yesterday — who would have imagined that a child of that description should come to this! It only shows what care and education can do."

Even for Mrs. Morrison this was rather a long speech, and, vulgarly speaking, she felt a little winded after it, since the torrent of her loquacity had floated them off the terrace, and up the rather steep incline toward the elm-avenue, which Walter and Margery had watched in trouble of gale two years ago. Up to this moment Arnold had not had the slightest chance of speaking, but now there was a second's pause, and he firmly filled it.

"I felt sure I could count on your good wishes, Mrs. Morrison," he said, "but you must please consider my news private till Margery gives me leave to make it public." (Mrs. Morrison mentally ejaculated: "What next?" at this provision.) "It is entirely for Walter's sake that she desires secrecy. It was but yesterday that she refused him; she felt, very beautifully, very delicately, I thought, that it would be too much to ask him to bear my felicity as well as his own pain. She intends, in fact, to go away, according to her previous plan, and take a place as governess at Mrs. Morland's."

There is a streak of romance, very exiguous it may be, and scarcely worth mining for, in the most conventional folk.

At this particular moment it cropped out in the arid barrenness of Mrs. Morrison's nature.

"And you will ride over *incognito?*" she asked, the gold suddenly gleaming, "and kiss her in the shrubbery? Dear me, it is quite like a novel, the poor governess, for I assure you she has not a *sou*, and the rich wooer."

"I knew you would be our friend, dear lady," he said, with very liberal interpretation of her speech.

He took his long-delayed departure soon after, and Margery and her aunt watched him canter away up the grass-slope in front of the house. Then Mrs. Morrison turned to the girl.

"I am going to give you a kiss, Margery," she said, "and when you are married, you must help me to find a nice husband for Olive. Fancy your being able to help Olive! What an up-and-down the world is, to be sure! You will certainly have to be presented."

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS a morning late on in May in the following year, and Margery, alone, was engaged over a very late breakfast at her house in Portman Square. She had been up last night until the small hours were beginning to grow of respectable size again, and had indulged in the luxury rather unusual for her of not being called at all to-day, and sleeping on until she woke up of her own accord. In consequence she had slept till very late, and Arnold had already breakfasted and gone out, before she appeared. He had left a little note for her on her plate, saying when he would be in, and proposing a short ride before lunch. After lunch they were going down to spend Sunday at their house in the country.

Margery opened a pile of letters as she breakfasted, invitations for the most part, and made notes of them in an enormous engagement book. When she found she was unable, owing to "previous," to accept any, she still put it down, enclosing it in a pencil line, to intimate that she had been asked but could not go, and it gave her little thrills of pleasure to see how many dinners she might have eaten on some such night, or have gone to how many dances, had not it been impossible to go to more than one dinner or more than two or three dances. She had never known, never even guessed how kind and hospitable people were; it really seemed as if half the people in town were wanting to see her.

She knew — so she said to herself — that it was Arnold they wanted to see, for this was the first time for several years that he had come up to town for the season, and of course everybody wanted him, but anyhow all these friends of his asked her also, and it was dreadfully nice of them, and she never had had such a delightful time before. That was a surface matter; she would have been not one jot less happy, if she had spent those months in the country instead, with him and his mother down at Elmhurst, but it certainly was huge fun being up here, in this whirl of May, and she was enjoying herself quite enormously. And that invitation, one from Aunt Aggie to dine on June 19, was actually the fourth invitation for the night, though it was over three weeks ahead. It was a grand dinner, too, with music afterward. How kind of Aunt Aggie to ask her to it, and what a pity she could not go.

Margery noted down the last of these; she would have to run over them all with Arnold when he came in, and ask him which he would go to, and went on with her breakfast with a most admirable appetite. Her face was still deliciously childlike and immature; and her soul had not lost one atom of that entire absence of self-consciousness which had always distinguished her. She entered into this great frolic of London life with the same abandonment, the same wholeheartedness as had been hers when at the beginning of her recorded history she lay on her bed and cried over the drowning of a kitten that had never been drowned at all. As a matter of fact, the world in general was doing its very best to spoil her, but that process, usually so swift and easy, had made no progress at all with regard to her. She did not

even resist the world's efforts in this direction; she was merely completely unconscious of them, and instead of reflecting complacently how charming everybody seemed to find her (which was the case) she only found them charming instead. For, after her repressed and subordinated years of youth, she had now within her a concentrated capacity for enjoyment of a colossal kind. The man she had secretly and silently adored had declared himself her lover, she was young, strong, beautiful, and at the same moment the doors had swung open into this dazzling, delicious life, where every faculty that held for enjoyment could be exercised to the full. And since the one gift which the little world known as The World really respects is the power of enjoyment, it may readily be conjectured that she was given ample opportunities. Never had a more radiant being dawned on the horizon: London saw that here at last was what they had been wanting so long. She was the latest fad, and many women who were old enough to know better, and much too old to have attempted the feat at all, tried to copy Margery's inimitable trick of being tremendously interested in anything that was brought before her attention, with very little result in the way of producing any illusion whatever. As a carefully-studied pose, in fact, even if it was maintained with fair consistency, the Margery-manner was no good at all. It only answered when it happened to be genuine, and somehow it had hall-marks, so to speak, stamped everywhere on it.

Lord Northwood, Arnold's uncle, to take a concrete and thus more convincing example of the effect she had, than these mere generalities, was an admirable case in point.

There have been cynical and selfish old men before, but he was a really prize-example of the species, and had been accustomed to look upon Arnold with a contemptuous dislike that almost merited respect, so sterling and genuine was it. He himself was a Crimean veteran, and thought but poorly of any one who was not; but since every one was not so fortunate as to have been in the Balaclava trenches (not having been born till long after they were filled up) Arnold might have tried to make amends for a fault that was not wholly his by getting killed in the South African War. If he had only done that he would also have made amends for the more unpardonable crime of being his heir, and Lord Northwood would then have transferred that part of his detestation to the next-of-kin. And apart from this *ex-officio* cause of hatred, namely, that his nephew would inherit all his property after he was dead, all that he knew of Arnold (he did not know much) confirmed his dislike of him. He believed that he lived in the country, ate slops, collected rubbishy images, read books, and, what was more despicable, wrote them, and went to bed at ten. That Arnold should marry was, of course, an added cause of odium, for, not content with being born, he must take steps which might conceivably lead to the perpetuation, so to speak, of his birth in the raising of a family. He himself was far too contemptuous of everybody else (except Balaclava veterans) ever to have married, and though from time to time the thought of ousting Arnold from his prospective honors and dignities offered some inducement in this direction, yet in order to oust Arnold he would have to beget a son himself, who would probably be just as odious as his nephew.

Lord Northwood was not, however, in voice, gesture, or appearance of the type (a comic one) of the red-faced hectoring Colonel, who talks about tiffin, and says, when bridge is mentioned, that whist is good enough for him. He was a bully, but not of a fulminating kind, and hated his fellows, not with roars and tirades and gesticulations, but with thin-lipped virulent irony. He never took the trouble to call Arnold a milksop and a book-worm (which was what he thought of him), but asked icily whenever they met what page he had got to in his book, and what it would be all about when he had done. And his quietness — that of north poles and other cold inhospitable quarters — was infinitely more formidable than shouting and stamping. Consequently, when he announced what he did in a letter of three lines without using the word congratulation that he was in receipt of the information that Arnold was going to marry, and wished to see the young woman (he wrote lady and substituted woman) who had been so fortunate as to catch his eye, there was no room for doubt that he intended to make himself as odious as possible. But Margery had received the news that she was to be the victim of this presentation, without tremor. "Oh, I do hope he will like me," she had said, "because I can't help feeling so much inclined to like everybody just now. And if, as you say, he is so fearfully sarcastic, I dare say I shan't understand a lot of it, and so I shan't mind."

She was to go with Arnold to lunch with the ogre in his huge, sombre house in Arlington Street, but it appeared when they got there that the ogre wished to see her alone before lunch, and even this, instead of being terrific, appeared to

Margery to be kind and thoughtful — epithets which almost amused Arnold in their incongruity. "He thinks we should be shy," she said, "if he saw us together for the first time. Isn't it nice of him?"

So she was shown into a large, square room overlooking the park, in which sat a tall, white old gentleman, extraordinarily grim in aspect, who rose when she came in, and made her an exaggerated bow.

"I believe I have the honour of seeing the lady who is to be my niece?" he said.

Margery advanced with perfect friendliness.

"Yes, you sent for me, you know," she said, "so of course I came. I was so pleased you wanted to see me."

She held out her hand, and he took it for one second and let it drop.

"Are we to remain standing here like damned posts?" he said, "or shall we sit down?"

"Whichever you like," said Margery cordially.

Now this was not in the least the sort of behaviour which he had expected. He was accustomed to a sort of defiant coldness from those whom he treated with his more directly offensive remarks, or, more often, to trembling and quaking on their part. But this tall, and not ill-looking girl, as he already acknowledged to himself, was neither defiant nor terrified. She looked at him with a friendly smile. That was not to be stood, and since she did not seem to mind his speeches he tried if she would break down from her apparently natural cheerfulness under a frigid silence. But she broke the silence at once instead.

"I thought it was nice of you to see me alone, too," she

said. "It's easier to talk alone, isn't it, especially when you are meeting a person for the first time?"

"So that the violence of one's rapture is not embarrassing to others," he said.

Here clearly was one of the famous sarcastic remarks. It did not confuse or confound Margery in the slightest. She wondered vaguely if something had disagreed with him to make him so cross, and decided that the best thing was to take him quite literally.

"Oh, it *is* nice of you to have looked forward to seeing me so much," she said. "I had no idea from your note to Arnold that you thought so much of it. I *am* pleased."

Certainly he was a very cross old gentleman, which was a pity, since it must spoil his pleasure to be so vitriolic. But she made a mistake there; extremely cross people usually enjoy their own ill-nature immensely.

"You don't mean that," he said, "you are pleased to be witty?"

"Well, you didn't mean what you said about our embarrassing Arnold by the violence of our rapture," said she.

"Do you answer Arnold back like that?" he asked.

"No; I think if he made sarcastic remarks to me I should laugh. Oh, yes, I'm sure I should."

"You spare me out of politeness?"

"Oh, it isn't polite to laugh at strangers," said Margery confidently. "You see, I know Arnold so very well."

And then quite suddenly this cross old man surrendered. Margery's youth, her child-like friendliness, and frankness all at once overcame him. It was no use trying to break them

down, and though he had not given the attempt a long trial, he had not wasted the time.

"My dear," he said, "you may laugh at me just whenever you like. And if you don't want lunch, I do. So let's come along."

Margery rose.

"I want it awfully," she said. "I am frightfully hungry."

And a moment later Arnold, waiting in another room, beheld the portentous spectacle of Margery entering the room on his uncle's arm. But it was soon perfectly evident that his uncle's feelings for him had undergone no change whatever.

Such was the almost instant effect which Margery had upon one of the sourest old men God ever made, and it was not the result of cleverness or of wit, since, as has been already abundantly shown, she was not at all gifted in this regard, nor, if she had been, would it have produced the slightest effect on that very shrewd old bear. But instead, she went up to it, and patted its head, and when it snapped at her, the very fact that she did not seem to be hurt (nor was she) made him not cease snapping, for he had by no means sacrificed that little indulgence, but made him snap first without any hope and soon without even any thought of hurting her. Long ago she had got on to the terms indicated in their first interview, the intimacy of laughing at him whenever it occurred to her to do so, and, outrageous as it sounds, outrageous, too, as at times it seemed to Lord Northwood himself, he was really fond of her. And since the world in general was, happily, not so sour-souled as her uncle, Margery's effect there, apart from the huge charm of her enjoy-

ment, was far greater. But it was founded on the same rock; it sprang from the wholesome sweetness of her nature.

Perhaps even more marked, and certainly more surprising, was the change that she had wrought not in the character (for character is a thing practically unchangeable) but in the life and habits of her husband. They had been married now for six months, and up till the present he had hardly done a week's work in any of those months, so that his uncle who before had despised him for an industrious bookworm, would have felt himself justified now, if he had needed justification, in despising him for his idleness. It was not that he had in the least lost his eye for beauty, his taste for classical line, his interest in antiquity, but what for the present had vanished was his zest for work. The tastes from which that sprang concerned his character and were unaltered, but his occupation, the manifestation, that is to say, of his tastes was completely changed. He did not study beauty at second-hand any longer, but first-hand in the body and mind of his wife. He knew a beautiful character when he saw it as well as he knew a beautiful picture, and he was well aware how exquisite was that which had become his own. But though his character was unchanged, it had ripened. Even as a green orange, sour and tooth-jarring, is as truly an orange as is the matured and aromatic fruit, so Arnold Leveson on this hot day of late May was as much himself as when a year ago he had been so sedulous over the Ptolemies. And the ripening had brought into fuller development certain sides of the character which hitherto had been, if not dormant, at any rate quiescent, waiting for that which should cause them to stir and take part in his life. Some of them were very

excellent qualities; some, it is to be feared, were not quite so amiable. They had grown slowly and gradually during those six months, and the following indication of what they were may be taken as representing what was current in him on this hot morning of May.

Hitherto his conscious life, the life that shows itself in what a man deliberately does, had, until he fell in love with Margery, been, to put it broadly, a sexless life. In themselves the Theocritan shepherdesses whom he read about, the Ptolemaic queens who were such doubtful occupants of a doubtful throne, had interested him exactly as much and no more than the corresponding shepherds and the corresponding kings. The drama of the girl's life, of the woman's life, had not concerned him more than the drama of the corresponding man, his heart had not quickened a single beat to the minute over either. They were engrossing historical or poetical figures, but he did not live with them in their lives, he only observed them with acute microscopical eye. And he had brought, hitherto, the same though less engrossed eye to observe his fellows. He did not want to take a part in the every-day drama of his time any more than he wanted to live under the Ptolemies. It was Margery who made him want to live to-day, and by the efficacy of the same touch it was Margery who made the dead world that had once been so engrossing to him, engrossing in another sense. He had begun to care not so much what the Ptolemies did, as what they thought. But since that was largely a matter of conjecture, he, for the present, left the Ptolemies alone, and was more concerned with all that was his now. Margery had been Pygmalion to him as Galatea; she had given him life,

and, as was natural, he had at first no eye except for her. For these six months he had been very genuinely in love, but with all the immense good that that had brought him, for it had been a fruitful wind of spring to his nature, it had also carried with it certain obnoxious germs which were just now beginning to assume some importance in his internal economy. Had he lived more in the world than he had done he would have taken it as a matter of course that young and attractive women are possessed of attractions and youth, and that the world delights in both these excellent gifts. He had begun to take his wife's welcome by the world a little ponderously, a little unfairly; in fact, a vague jealousy was beginning to stir in him. Half the time he loved to see the frolic welcome which she and the world showered on each other; half the time he wondered what it all meant. That was the effect of his previous aloofness from the world; he could not quite take the simple view; he had to spy for reasons just as he spied at unsuspicious Greek particles, wondering why exactly they were there.

He saw, too, and loved and delighted in Margery's — Margery's unthoughtfulness. (He was not sure if he would have been satisfied with that word had he been writing a treatise on Margery, but, on the whole, it expressed his meaning.) It was not "want of thought," that he meant, but a certain serene *sans-dire* welcome that she unhesitatingly gave to all that came in her way. She thought about those recipients of her bounty quite tremendously, but the unthoughtfulness concerned her welcome of them. She was not like the charity commissioners; she never went into the merits of cases. Whatever came to her as a case, and what-

ever the case desired, whether it was merely to "play about" or was in need of some sort of help, she gave it with enthusiasm, and in the warmth of her heart made sure that it was deserving of any help that she could give it. "Poor dears, they have such a dreadful time," was one formula that covered a great deal. "Poor dears, they did like it so much," really seemed to cover the rest of the possible ground. To both these formulas he responded; the thrill of actual life demanded that, but it had several times happened that after Margery had done something for the "poor dears," he repented that he had allowed it. His response was wholly admirable; his subsequent consideration as to whether he should have allowed it was not so good, and what was very bad was that he now allowed himself to add up these instances and make, as it were, a mental bill against Margery.

Instances which will explain this were common enough. Once, during May, they had projected a dinner-party, and Margery had suggested music afterward. That seemed reasonable, and since she "knew about" music and he did not she had the entire responsibility of the entertainment. The effect, however, was quite excruciating; even he could understand that. For Margery, warm of heart, had engaged as the principal syren a soprano who had fallen on evil days, or on whom evil days had fallen with crushing effect, and had now a turbulent voice of extreme power over which she had little control. She was a "poor dear," however, which settled the matter, and Margery had not the slightest notion that the evil days were mainly of her own making, and were a direct consequence of the cup that inebriates while it cheers. She had sung one roof-lifting aria, and then had

staggered from the room with a wild eye and several loud hiccups. An extremely awkward pause succeeded while Margery followed her out with an expression of child-like compassion, returning after a few minutes to relieve everybody's mind by telling them that poor Madame Buonvicini was far from well, but had promised to go straight home and go to bed. She thought that it was not influenza, but surely to go to bed was the wisest to do in the case. Everybody agreed that Madame Buonvicini had done the wisest thing, and as Margery's candid news spread round the room people laughed a little, but kindly and affectionately. It was a bore to have to listen to that dreadful woman singing, but Margery's sweet and incredible explanation, which was clearly so real to the girl, gave to many a little thrill of charmed delight which the most exquisite singing would not have given. But Arnold, to whom, as to the rest of the room, the cause of the *prima donna's* indisposition was evident, felt that the party would be London's laughing-stock. In a certain way it was, but the laughter was not of ridicule, it was of delight in Margery. Then, as Madame had gone to bed, and so could not deliver her second group of songs, Monsieur Buonvicini, who had been engaged to accompany his wife, was induced to play a solo to take the place of these. He selected an immense sonata by Beethoven, at the end of which every one found it was later than she had expected, and must go. But it was a hundred times that Margery said, "Oh, I am glad you enjoyed it. Didn't he play beautifully?" And everybody cordially agreed that this ponderous performance had been quite lovely.

Arnold had felt bound, when Margery announced her

intention next morning of going round to inquire how the incapacitated songstress was, to tell her of the real state of the case, and Margery had received his news with incredulous indignation.

"I can't possibly believe it," she said. "She told me herself that she was just seized with a dizziness, which might happen to anybody. I don't think she can have been so disgusting as to have come to my house to sing when she was drunk!"

"Ask any one who was here last night," he said.

"I will. I will ask Lord Northwood. He particularly told me how sorry he was for Madame Buonvicini, and how he enjoyed our party."

"Yes, dear, by all means go and ask him," said Arnold.

It was a Margery rather inclined to tears who returned in about an hour's time.

"Oh, Arnold, I am sorry," she said, "and nobody will ever want to come to see us any more. Uncle Jack says there wasn't the least doubt that she was what he called 'a little bit on,' and I knew what he meant. And he says she's always doing it. I didn't know; nobody had told me. Oh, do forgive me. I have made such a f-fool of myself. But how could I tell? One doesn't ask everybody if she is quite sure she is sober. You — you take it for granted. But I shall send her her cheque just the same, though he told me not to, because she would never dare to ask for it. But if everybody saw, I must say they were dreadfully kind about it. No one even hinted such a thing, and they all said they'd had a delicious evening."

It had been impossible to do anything except console and

comfort her, and the cheque was sent. Two days afterward Margery had a further announcement to make.

"She wrote me such a nice letter," she said, "thanking me for the cheque, and telling me all about it. She said she had been dreadfully tired and had taken two glasses of champagne before she came here, and they had gone straight to her head, because she hadn't felt up to eating any dinner. I think it so nice of her to confess. And she says she will be delighted to come and sing again for nothing. Don't you think we might give her another chance? I expect she's awfully sorry."

But there Arnold had been quite firm. He was glad that Madame Buonvicini was sorry, but she must not bring her sorrow here. Margery had thought it rather hard of him, but supposed he was possibly right.

Then, again, to take a further instance of the items out of which he was forming his mental bill against Margery, there was her conduct with regard to Harry Morland. That young gentleman, an old friend of Margery's it is true, had had a very spirited book on the Derby, with the unfortunate result that he was left with a hundred pounds more of debts than he could possibly pay. Arnold did him the justice to allow that he had not actually asked Margery for the money, but he had let her lend it him, and apparently she had seen the propriety of not telling anybody, even her husband, about it. He had found it out by a purely accidental glance at Margery's cheque-book, which she had left lying about, and there in a clear round hand (Margery's businesslike hand, which was very different from her usual feverishly-hurried scrawl) there was written on a counterfoil "Harry M

(Derby debt), £100." It did not seem unreasonable to ask for an explanation, though his knowledge was due to an accident, and Margery had given it under seal of secrecy.

"No, darling, I haven't been betting with Harry," she said, "but you know his father isn't very nice to him, and, of course, it was dreadfully foolish of Harry, but there he was, and couldn't pay his debts, which are debts of honour, you know. So, of course, I lent it him, and he's promised not to bet any more. He didn't a bit want me to lend it him; I had to insist, and make him remember we were old friends. And he's going to pay me back next quarter-day."

It was always the same with her — much as she enjoyed the frolic of life, she seemed to get a far deeper satisfaction from befriending the "poor dears," and all those who were bores, who were tiresome, who were unsuccessful, earned from her the warmest welcome. And the motive was always the same, she was having a delightful time herself and wanted everybody else to have a delightful time too. Her Eden was no game-preserve. There were no notices about trespassers being prosecuted, no flame-sworded angel stood in the gate. The gate stood wide and the only notice put up was "There isn't such a thing as a trespasser."

Now all this had, to a certain point, nothing but a good and humanizing influence on her husband, but all the time, though only half-consciously, he was adding up a bill against Margery; and as he became more conscious of it and its items, they seemed to form a sober and serious indebtedness. It was very good that she should be young and enjoy herself, but her enjoyment must not be considered the business of life. So far he had entirely yielded to her, and identified himself with

her frivolities, but the time had come when he must put the truer and more serious aspects of existence before her. Music, for instance, was all very well, and like a man of culture and enlightenment, he was quite willing that he should have musical parties. But music was one thing and tipsy sopranos another. Again, kindness was an excellent quality, but if a young married woman paid the debts of a young man, people would say things. (How, by the way, "people" should know that this had happened he did not consider.) And this same excellent quality of kindness did not imply that all the bores and frumps should continually lunch in Portman Square. Decidedly he had reason on his side, for some of Margery's luncheon parties had really been composed of the mentally lame, halt, and blind, but such arguments (as above) were not really the cause of his growing dissatisfaction. The cause was that he already a little envied the triumphant expansiveness of Margery's heart. His own did not expand to bores; he thought they were a check on social enjoyment. So also, as a matter of fact, did Margery. But with her the premises that they were "poor dears" overrode the temporary inconvenience.

He had his own serious views of existence as well. Though he had sacrificed (not that it had been any sacrifice) practically six months of life to her without more than opening a Greek anthology, it was clear that he must set to work again, and capture, kill, and pin down, so to speak, like a specimen of a butterfly, some further epoch of historical importance. But work was impossible in London, for he did not care for Margery going about without him, and if he went dancing and dining every night, how was he to regain that tranquil and

unharassed frame of mind in which alone good work was possible? Besides, even without work, he was far from sure that all this flurry was good for him. His health, he knew, was sound without being robust, and several times lately he had awoke with a slight headache, which warned him that he had better not burn too much of even one end of the candle. And on this very morning, when Margery breakfasted so late, he, as he walked home, opened his mind, so to speak, to himself, and found that what had been vaguely simmering there like raw eggs, had taken form and solidity. They were poached, cooked; he and Margery would discuss them together.

But it must not be inferred that his ardour for her had cooled. It was only that he told himself that he had a duty toward her as well as toward himself. And if this beam of duty was a little coloured—only a shade—with the green of a just perceptible jealousy, he was not as yet quite conscious of it.

She had but just gone to her room with her engagement-book and the sheaf of cards of invitation when Arnold came in.

"Oh, Arnold," she cried, "you are just in time. Everybody wants us both to go everywhere always, and as we can't, do tell me which to accept and which not. Aren't they all kind? And Uncle Jack is going to give a week-end party in July and wants me to be hostess. I don't believe he's ever done such a thing before, and won't he be cross before it's over? What a darling!"

Arnold took the cards from her.

"I suppose we had better go," he said, "though it is in July, and I had plans for July. However, I'll tell you them later."

"Oh, but I would sooner do your plan than any of Uncle Jack's," said Margery. "What is it? Of course it would be nicest of all if we could fit them both in."

"Madame Buonvicini at home!" said Arnold, looking at the uppermost card.

"Oh, is that there?" said Margery, without confusion. "I made a mistake. I didn't mean you to see that."

"And did you mean to go?" asked he.

"Well, yes, just for a minute or two. You see, dear, you tell me she isn't — isn't quite a teetotaler, and I don't think it's quite proved. So anyhow it could have done no harm if I just went and shook hands. I'm sure she doesn't have a nice time, not that my going would make it any nicer, but if you're rather miserable, it helps a little to know that people are friendly. Particularly as it was here that she wasn't — wasn't quite well."

"Don't answer that please, Margery," said he. "And please don't go."

Margery glanced at the card.

"But it's R.S.V.P.," she said.

He could not help smiling.

"I believe if Judas Iscariot sent you an R.S.V.P. you would answer it," he said.

"Yes, I think I should, though I should say I was afraid I couldn't come."

"Well, then, if you prefer it, tell Madame Buonvicini you are afraid you can't come. But she would understand equally well if you didn't answer it, and no answer is the best reply to such impertinence."

Margery looked at him with her clear untroubled gaze.

"I don't think I agree with you, darling," she said. "I feel sure poor Madame doesn't mean to be impertinent."

"She is successful, then, without intention," remarked Arnold.

"Oh, but I don't think that is possible," said Margery. "Impertinence implies that you mean to do something cheeky and outrageous."

Arnold suddenly felt a little impatient with her. He did not wish to argue about this bawling old inebriate.

"It is not worth discussing," he said. "But I do not wish you to go to Madame Buonvicini's. I will say nothing of her impertinence. I am merely telling you my wishes. Is that enough?"

Margery laughed. But she laughed partly to reassure herself.

"I don't think you need ask me that," she said.

"No. I need not. I am not unreasonable, dear, and there are some things you must simply take my word for There are others again about which we will discuss. Again there are others for which I take your word."

Margery wondered for one fleeting moment what these could be, and then turned her wonder neck and crop out of her mind. It had no place there.

Arnold glanced over the rest of the cards and notes of invitation, and saw they were all strictly respectable.

"Please yourself entirely over what you accept and what you refuse, dear," he said. "You know I want you to enjoy yourself just as much as you can. You will have rather a full time all June."

"Oh, it will be crammed," said Margery appreciatively. "So will July."

"Ah, about July," said he; "that concerns my plan. Accept Uncle Jack's invitation by all means. It will please him. But after that I am thinking that I must set seriously to work again."

Margery turned to him with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Arnold, I *am* glad," she said. "Your work is so beautiful and I do want you to write another book like the Alexandrian one. And the British Museum is so handy here."

"That is not quite what I meant," said he. "I am sure I should find it impossible to work in town, and we should go down to Elmhurst. After all, you will have had two months in town."

"I know, and — and it will be quite lovely to be in the country again," said Margery almost immediately seeing the bright side of a scheme that was for the first moment rather a shock. "And I shall really practise the piano, and in the evening I will play you what I have learned, and you will read me what you have written. And in August Walter will be coming to Ballards, I know. I heard from him this morning. And shan't we have a couple of week-end parties?"

He laughed.

"Margery, you are incorrigible," he said. "My plan is to get entirely out of London distractions, and you amend it by proposing to bring London down into the country. My dear, we have played pretty thoroughly; now let me work thoroughly for a few months. The prospect doesn't appal you?"

"Appal me?" she asked, laying her head on his shoulder, "why, it's enchanting!"

"You won't mind a solitary month or two without guests or visitors?"

"Ah, how can it be solitary when I've got you there?" she asked softly.

CHAPTER IX

IT WOULD be absurd to say that Margery looked forward to leaving town at the end of June without regret, even though she had told her husband with the most candid sincerity that a quiet month or two in the country would be enchanting. Enchanting, without doubt, she believed she would find them, but their enchantment would not have been in any way impaired if it had been postponed till the end of July. She was enjoying herself with such whole-hearted exuberance that it was impossible not to wish that it had not occurred to Arnold that he must get on with his work without further delay, or, in default of that, that it had been possible for him — with the British Museum and all its books and objects and professors so handy — to pursue his studies here in London. But it never occurred to her to argue, even tacitly, about those things. Arnold had said he must set to work again, and that he could not do so in town. And that, as far as Margery was concerned, was the end of any possible controversial attitude.

But from Mrs. Morrison's point of view it was only the beginning of a controversial attitude, and since Margery, in her note of regret that she could not dine on the nineteenth had mentioned the fact that they were leaving London early in July, her aunt came round next morning to talk about it and other things, choosing half-past twelve as a suitable hour, for she could then have what she called a

"good" talk to her niece and almost certainly be asked to lunch at the end of it, in case she was lunching at home. She particularly liked lunching with Margery, because all sorts of people dropped in. At her house people never dropped in; they only came when they were asked, and went away immediately afterward, while the pudding, so to speak, if not the meat, was yet in their mouths.

Margery, it may be mentioned, had since her marriage come to occupy a very different place in her aunt's estimation, and Mrs. Morrison now regarded her with a variety of mean, mixed feelings, instead of considering her as a type of insignificance. Margery had made (inexplicable though it seemed) a brilliant marriage. For that Mrs. Morrison respected her, envied her, and disliked her. Margery was quite capable now of "doing things" for her aunt, and for that reason Mrs. Morrison both made up to her, and simultaneously resented the fact that she should be able to do so. Then with a confusion of mind that was almost pathetic, she had a secret grudge against the present brilliant and popular Margery for having refused to marry Walter, whereas at the time when she refused, Mrs. Morrison would have considered her a monster of ingratitude and deception had she done anything else. Also she had deprived Olive of the chance (which was really non-existent) of marrying Arnold. Arnold was to blame here, too; it appeared to Mrs. Morrison that he had really jilted Olive, though he had never had the smallest thought of asking her to marry him. At the same time he had married Margery, which fed Mrs. Morrison's self-esteem, for it showed what kindness (her kindness) and sense of duty (her sense

of duty) could make of a girl who came out of the slums. Also — it was without the faintest suspicion of its baselessness that she said this to herself — she had brought them together. This deplorable jumble of falsities, thus briefly catalogued, will indicate her general mental attitude toward her niece, and account for the rich and varied nature of her conversation.

She rustled hurriedly into the room, and put the fat Japanese pug she carried on to the hearthrug, where it instantly fell asleep.

"Delightful to find you in, dear," she said, "and as for once I have half-an-hour to spare, though I am sure the rest of the day is just a mosaic of engagements, and I had to take Pug out for a little air, I managed to come round, for if you're going away early in July, it's little enough I shall see of you, and your not being able to come on the nineteenth is a great disappointment. I think you might have left the nineteenth open, Margery, for you must have known well that I always give my musical party on the nineteenth or thereabouts, if it isn't a Sunday, and after all these years I wasn't likely to alter my date. But there it is, and no doubt it was foolish of me to expect you could come without making sure, and I left Olive arranging the table all over again. But dear Olive is very capable and domestic, and does not want to be rushing about after pleasures all day and night, but is contented to do her home duties, and be my companion, and all disappointments and upset expectations, I declare, worry her less than they do me, for I never hear a word of complaint. Dear me, Pug is asleep again; I often wonder if he gets too much exercise."

This last topic was rather hurriedly introduced; Mrs. Morrison had not exactly meant to say what she had done about Olive's disappointments; she did not at any rate want Margery to ask her more definitely to what she alluded. It was but an irrepressible little spurt of spite against her niece. It may then be inferred that she knew Margery quite as little as ever, for Margery perfectly understood, and had not the smallest intention of asking for an explanation. For one moment a little wistful look crossed her face, as she silently wished that Aunt Aggie did not feel like that, and then she laughed.

"I don't think Pug looks worn out with exertion," she said.

"No, dear, but you are so strong; perhaps you do not allow for others being less hardy and fortunate than yourself. No doubt you will get more indulgent and gentle for others as you grow older. My nights are very broken sometimes now, and when I lie awake I think of all the other poor souls who are lying awake, and feel sorry for them, which I dare say is much better for one than going to sleep soundly oneself. When I was young I used to require hardly any sleep at all, but now with all my anxieties and troubles I feel the want of it."

"Oh, Aunt Aggie, I'm so sorry," said Margery. "Aren't you having a nice time?"

Mrs. Morrison felt ill-used and misunderstood.

"I'm sure I make no complaints," she said, "for you ought to know very well that I make it a rule never to complain, and since I do not talk about my troubles, I am pleased that everybody should think me happy and contented. But

what with Walter at his post so far away in Athens, and all the trouble in the Balkans next door, so to speak, so that there may be massacres and that sort of thing there any day, and his not coming home till August, and you going away in July, about which I want to talk to you. And even then it's but little there is for Walter to look forward to, for I expect he will find Ballards very dull after his brilliant life abroad, with just Olive and me, a widowed mother and a broken-hearted sister, and then there will be the raking up of old wounds, or rather the tearing open; not that I blame you, dear, for if you were in love with Arnold, why there it is, and you couldn't be expected to do differently not if there were fifty Walters, but I must be permitted to be sorry for them, if it does not hurt you, and, indeed, I cannot see how it should, especially if you are going away in July, which I came to ask you about. What does it all mean?"

Mrs. Morrison, since she never complained, must have been doing something else. As it was not quite clear what that was, Margery left it quite alone, and answered the last question.

"Oh, it merely means that Arnold wants to set to work again," she said, "and he finds he can't work in town. So we are going to Elmhurst. He has been dreadfully lazy all these last six months, and as he says it is my fault ——"

"Have you had a quarrel?" asked Mrs. Morrison, with genial eagerness.

Margery stared at her a moment.

"A quarrel? How could we?" she asked.

"But you tell me he says it is your fault."

Margery laughed.

"Oh, that is his silliness — his dear silliness," she said. "He pretends he has been so — so fond of me that he hasn't thought about his work."

Mrs. Morrison felt vaguely disappointed.

"I am so very glad," she said, "so very glad. I was afraid that you might have had some disagreement, and then, indeed, there would be little but tragedy for all of us. Pug has awoke. See how he takes notice of a new room! Is he not very quick and intelligent? I am sure I quite thought that both he and I would feel ourselves quite at home in your house by now, but I declare I have hardly set eyes on you, dear, and if you will insist on going away at the end of June, it's little more I shall see of you, since you have filled up the nineteenth!"

Mrs. Morrison gave a retrospective sigh.

"How well I remember the few days before your marriage," she said. "When I had finished getting your trousseau and the wedding-cake, and all was ordered, and there was no more to be done, what talks we used to have! And how well I remember your saying that I had been a second mother to you, and would I go on advising and helping you after your marriage? You felt yourself so young, as indeed you were, dear, to go out into the world and be the mistress of a house."

As a matter of fact it was Mrs. Morrison who had stated these things, with considerable emphasis, so that Margery could scarcely help assenting. This time she did not wait for her assent.

"And so now, dear," she went on, "I shall fulfil my promise of advising and looking after you, and to tell you the truth I don't think your plan of going into the country

at the end of June is a good one. People will think it so odd, and when you have lived in the world a little longer you will see how important it is never to do things which are thought odd. I am sure nobody can call me conventional, but I do see the sense of behaving reasonably. So if I were you I should be firm. The ancient Egyptians or Greeks or whoever it is going to be this time, have been waiting many hundred years already for Arnold's books — most interesting I am sure — to be published about them, and they can very well wait a month longer. Besides ——"

Mrs. Morrison found it hard to proceed for a moment, but a very short pause was sufficient to let her get steam up again.

"I should never think of asking you for anything for myself," she went on, "though I am sure it would be little surprise to any one who knew a quarter of what I have done for you, if I looked for some little return from the years of care and expense which I have poured out on you. But it has never been my way to look for any returns for what I do, and I shan't begin now, not that I accuse you of ingratitude, for nothing was further from my thoughts. But when I think of Olive, and how the dear child was looking forward to all the dinners and dances and gaiety which she would enjoy at your house, and the pride she would take in seeing you at the head of your table, and when I consider that we have dined here but twice, and once there was nobody but Arnold and yourself and no party, then I must say that I think you might do a little more for Olive. But not a word has she said to me about it; she has too great a pride for that, for in many ways she takes after me."

Margery could not have lived with Aunt Aggie for so long without knowing that much of what she said required, so to speak, retranslation before it could be taken to be a veracious rendering of what she thought. These retranslations she was accustomed to make without comment in her own mind, and with no desire there except to find out what her aunt wanted. And she swiftly made her retranslation now without unkindness or ridicule. What it amounted to was Aunt Aggie wants to come to dinner two or three times. Then she answered, not her own retranslation, but the Authorized Version.

"Oh, dear, I am sorry," she said. "And it has been so like me; I have been enjoying myself so much that I must have supposed that you and Olive — that Olive (the correction was extraordinarily quick) was having a splendid time too. But what am I to do, Aunt Aggie? Arnold really wants to go away at the end of June and get to his work again, and he finds it impossible up in town. Can't we arrange a night or two before we go, when you can persuade Olive to come and dine?"

Margery, with her usual impulsive geniality, seized the enormous engagement book, and rapidly turned over its pages.

"There's the twentieth," she said. "We are not dining out, and we're going to the Bractons' ball after. Dear me, it is close on lunch-time! Of course, you'll stop, Aunt Aggie; there are two or three people coming? But the twentieth now — I'll try to scrape some people together, and we'll all dine here, and — and Olive does like dancing, doesn't she? We'll all go on to the ball afterward. Violet asked me to bring some people. And tell Olive I shall chaperone her and

not you. What fun! I never chaperoned anybody before. Does one have to stand in one place all the time, like — like a city of Refuge? Then there's the thirteenth. Let's have a little party for the opera."

Mrs. Morrison had given herself away, and in her heart she knew it. She had definitely asked Margery to ask her to some sort of party, and Margery, with complete amiability, had done so. Therefore, Mrs. Morrison vaulted, so to speak, on to another horse. Her invitation, she thought, to a dinner-party, and Lady Bracton's dance afterward, was secure. She could now go there if she wished (and she certainly did wish) and, therefore, she tried to appear as if she did not in the least want to go.

"Is that the Lady Bracton who was divorced?" she said. "I am not sure that I should like to take Olive there. I dare say it is all right, but there is some story, no doubt you are too young to remember, Margery ——"

That, to put it plainly, was scandal, for which there is a legal redress. Mrs. Morrison would certainly, had there been a witness, have been liable to punishment. Yet the motive for defamation of character was altogether absent; she only wished not to appear to wish to go to Lady Bracton's ball, though she longed to go there. She also meant to go there. But for the next minute it was doubtful whether she would get there.

Margery got up.

"I think they said lunch was ready, Aunt Aggie," she said, "and we always sit down when lunch is ready, and other people come when they are ready. Shall we go down? Do let us have a little dinner on the twentieth, as

we settled, and then there will be no necessity for you or Olive to go on to Violet Bracton's dance if you don't feel like taking Olive there. I shall go, of course, because we are great friends; also it will be great fun. She isn't divorced at all, you know, Aunt Aggie; you have got that quite, quite wrong, and so I had better tell you so, hadn't I? It is quite true that she doesn't live with her husband, but that was because he was quite impossible to live with. I don't think there is any need for me to tell you all about it. Shall we go to lunch? I am so hungry. But I think it is rather a pity to make suggestions like that, Aunt Aggie ——"

Margery paused a moment, her sweet, honest soul up in revolt against the infamy of idle story-telling, especially by people who knew nothing whatever about it. Her face flushed, but no trace of the emotion that caused that was in her voice.

"It might have done harm," she said, "if I hadn't happened to know. I might have repeated it. And though I don't suppose that anything I say can have the least influence, we can't quite tell. I think it is an awful pity to talk about things one doesn't quite know about. And if one does know about them, and they aren't quite nice, one doesn't want to talk about them and make them worse. At least that is what I think."

Now Mrs. Morrison wanted, quite particularly, to go to Lady Bracton's ball. Already she had successfully intrigued for an invitation, and here was Margery saying, "Don't go if you would rather not." Her desire to go was greater than her dislike of climbing down. But down she climbed, though it took a good many words.

"Margery," she said, "I know of nothing that has pleased me more than to be assured that Lady Bracton is the sort of person one hoped she was. Of course, dear, it is rather irregular that a married woman should give a dance without her husband, but ——"

"Ah, then, don't go," said Margery. "I — I couldn't possibly take you there, if I thought you were — were thinking things."

Mrs. Morrison caught up the sleeping Pug, which, having taken notice, had slumbered again.

"I am thinking nothing of any kind," said Mrs. Morrison. "And I know quite well how particular dear Arnold is, and that you are his wife. But, dear me, what a lot of words about nothing. I only said what other people are saying, and I am sure that I have no desire to put ideas into your mind. Indeed, after what you have said, I feel it my duty to go to Lady Bracton's house just to show how false I believe to be all the scandal that one hears."

They were half-way down the stairs from Margery's room to the drawing-room, and Margery stood still, facing her aunt.

"Please tell me what you have heard then?" she said.

"Nothing, nothing at all, I assure you," said Mrs. Morrison, rather agitated. Her agitation was such that she squeezed Pug, who yelped in a wheezy asthmatic manner.

"Then if you have heard nothing," said Margery, "what do you mean? If you have heard nothing, what is it you have been hinting at?"

Aunt Aggie drew herself up in her most dignified manner. She did that to save time and think what to say. All she

knew was that Lady Bracton, whose husband was alive, lived by herself and gave parties to which she most intensely wanted to go. The only objection was that hitherto she had never been asked. But when Margery made it perfectly easy for her to go, her mean and carping mind had to pretend that it was a simple thing to ask Mrs. Morrison anywhere, but not so easy to get her to condescend to go. But that attitude had been a mistake, and she changed it.

"I cannot tell you, dear Margery," she said, "how *very*, very glad I am to hear that Lady Bracton's is quite the sort of house one can go to. I am sorry I ever thought differently, though I am glad I mentioned it, since that has been the means whereby it has been cleared up. But that has always been my motto, 'Be frank, and speak out.' We will come to dinner with pleasure on the twentieth, if Olive is up to it after my party on the nineteenth. And if she is not, I shall make a point of coming myself to show how glad I am that — well, I have said that before. Let us change the subject. Whom do you expect to lunch?"

Mrs. Morrison felt that she had done a good deal for Olive, when she returned home that day, for self-deception is a faculty that grows very rapidly, and quite a little practice is sufficient to make firm and solid convictions in the mind of the practiser which have no relation of any kind to actual fact. Indeed, the whole of her talk with her niece, reflected in her account of it to Olive, had produced an impression worth setting down, so strangely was it bent and distorted. Just as water distorts the lines of any object placed in it, so that a stick half in the water and half out appears straight no longer, but with one half set at an angle to the other, so

Mrs. Morrison's colourless and transparent mind warped all that passed through it. Yet even as it is the same stick that appears bent, it was the same conversation, and no other, that now came out at a different angle.

"Yes, Margery seemed well," she said, "and I hope she is happy. But she said something about Arnold saying that some little disagreement they had had was her fault. I could not quite understand, and one does not like to pry and ask questions."

Olive suspended her work for a moment. It was a kind of tatting done with thread, each piece of which when complete made a small square mat which looked like lace and was not. In the exercise of its functions it stood between a finger-bowl and a dessert plate. The pattern was formed by a mixture of crochet stitches and hard knots, which she tied very tight as if she was strangling something.

"Margery can be very provoking at times," she said, in a voice that had grown a little more acid, though not less colourless. "Did she ask you to dinner?"

There was no nonsense about Olive; but as her mother put it to herself, she was not very tactful.

"Dear me, yes; nothing would content her but that I must promise to dine with her on the thirteenth and go to the opera, and on the twentieth go to Lady Bracton's ball. You too, of course, dear ——"

Olive strangled one piece of thread with another.

"The thirteenth is Tuesday," she observed. "It is your night for the box. I dare say Margery remembered that."

"I declare I forgot myself," said Mrs. Morrison. "But I think it would be kind if we went with Margery, and I will

let my box for that night. Very likely Margery does not find it too easy to get people to go to the opera with her, after that dreadful party of hers with Madame Buonvicini rolling about the room. She made quite a point of our coming. No doubt that is why, poor child."

"Her portrait was in the *Sketch* this week," said Olive.

"So I was told. Indeed, I saw it at a station bookstall exposed for everybody to look at. I am sure, if I had been asked a hundred times to let my picture appear in an illustrated paper, I should have said 'No' a hundred times, and been surprised people could think it of use."

It was fortunate, therefore, that the editors of these periodicals had not given themselves the trouble to make a request which would have had so poor a chance of being acceded to. Olive thought of that, but she had not time to put it neatly into words, as her mother went on without pause.

"And then she wants us to go to dine on the twentieth, as I said, and go to Lady Bracton's party. Poor Lady Bracton: I dare say it would be a kindness to go and help to fill her rooms for her, so I said that I would go, and you too — Margery specially asked you — if you were not too tired with my party the day before. And then at the end of the month Margery and Arnold are both leaving town, to stay at Elmhurst. She said Arnold wanted to get on with his work, though, not having asked him, I could not say what account he would give of the matter. It would not be the first time that poor Margery had screened herself at the expense of others, though I dare say she does her best to be truthful and straightforward, and we must take the will for the deed.

Dear me, yes, how many times a day one has to assure oneself of that, and believe that people are doing the best they can. When I think of the selfish lives some people lead, how it is lunch, tea, dinner, dance all day and night, sometimes I wonder if they have any sense of duty or home-affection. See, Pug notices the new tassels we have on the window curtains. He smells them as if they were something quite strange."

Olive looked toward the window-seat and tied the end of her little finger in one of the strangling knots. She released it. "They are strange," she said, "as they only were put on yesterday. I suppose they smell different to a dog. I do not think I shall go to Lady Bracton's party, as I do not care about dancing, and I dare say Margery only asked me out of kindness. Did you ask her to ask me?"

Mrs. Morrison's mind told her that she had already done a great deal for Olive to-day; it appeared now that she had to be made martyr for her good deeds. Olive was a perfect adept at inconvenient and stupid questions.

"As if I should ask Margery!" she exclaimed. "Why, I had not mentioned such a thing. I had but said that you — that we had seen so little of her, and should see but little more, if she was determined to go into the country in the very middle of June. And then, there she was with her engagement book, turning over the pages, and seeing what days were possible for me. Now I wonder about Margery's engagement book. I'm sure no one has more to do than I have always had in London, and my engagement book, the little one in green, such as I have had since I was married, has always been sufficient. But then I never tried to make a

parade of being invited and sought after, and to-day I wondered if Margery just scribbled a lot of things down that meant nothing."

Olive made some more hard knots.

"I thought you didn't approve of Lady Bracton," she said. "Perhaps I am wrong. No doubt I am, as you want to go there. But that afternoon there is the Kensington bazaar."

Olive pondered a moment.

"But I will come back early from that," she said. "I dare say my stall will be quite empty in an hour or two. It is difficult to know how to deal with Margery. I want to be kind to her, but she insists on being kind to me. Perhaps you are right, mother, and perhaps she has a very unhappy, quarrelsome life. But she cannot prevent our being kind to her. We must always be that. Perhaps even it is kind of me to let her think she is kind to me. So I will go both to the opera and to this dance, though, as I said, I do not care about dancing. However, I dare say, I shall not get many partners. And if that pleases Margery too, so much the better."

Mrs. Morrison always drove in the Park from half-past five till seven every afternoon during the summer when it was fine, just as she always drove in the country from three to half-past four during the winter, in the motor-car which a few years ago had superseded the two fat horses. Olive usually and Pug invariably accompanied her, and every day she said to the footman, "I do not want to drive fast; tell Donaldson not to drive fast." To-day, however, Olive did not go with her, for she was a little behindhand with the strangled

string mats for the bazaar on the twentieth, and remained at home in order to catch up. The work did not require close attention except when the first main lines of it were being laid down, and having taken up a comfortable position on the sofa, and told the butler she was at home to nobody, she knew that for an hour and a half she would be able to indulge, uninterrupted, in any reflections that she might care to make.

They all concerned herself, or, more accurately, where they concerned others, it was how others bore upon herself, that occupied her. She had her mother's gift of self-deception, and a little practice had made her fully believe that she today would have been Arnold's wife had not Margery stepped in between them. What he had seen in her, Olive could not imagine, but he was perfectly at liberty to marry whom he chose. It was true she did not care for him any more than she cared for anybody else, but she would have been perfectly willing to marry him, and she felt that she would have always conducted herself with absolute propriety and correctness. She would never have been late for dinner, she would never have thwarted any wish or desire of his, and she would never have been selfish. And to do poor Olive justice, this hypothetical survey was perfectly likely. Though she did not care for anybody else, she did not really care for herself. It would have been something if she had been selfish, for then it is possible that she in her dreary, joyless life might have felt its joylessness, its dreariness, and have been stung by the sense of loneliness into wanting interest, desire, love. Even her mother, with her infinitesimal schemes, her feeble ambitions, her maunderings about Pug's health, her envy

and malice toward Margery, was more alive than Olive, for though Olive had deceived herself into believing that Margery had cut her out with regard to Arnold, she had not even the psychic vitality (evil though it might be) to detest Margery. She had no feeling whatever toward Margery or anybody else except slight vague resentment toward them all. She did not live, she only passed the hours dully, comfortably, without fears or hopes. She went to concerts, plays, operas, she read books (and always knew when she took up the current volume again to what page she had got). She could even discuss with intelligence the different points of dramatic interest in such things, but she only observed the points; the points never pricked her.

It was rather a dark evening, and when the church clock struck seven she left the sofa, and sat in a chair in the window. Once she stopped her work to open a couple of notes that had come for her. One was a feverishly scribbled note from Margery with a large blot in the middle of the page, saying that the thirteenth and the twentieth must instantly be put down in her engagement book and underlined, and Olive devoted a few moments' thought to wondering what there was to be so excited about. But she never guessed that mere warm-heartedness was at the bottom of it. In any case Margery might have taken another sheet of paper — and torn off the blank half — after making such a blot. She herself never made blots, for she wrote with a stylograph. A stylograph, quite a nice one with a little gold band, would do for Margery's next birthday present. That would be in the autumn some time. But she would buy the stylograph next day. The best ones cost a guinea.

At precisely half-past seven there came the sound of a motor stopping outside. She did not look out, for she knew it must be her mother.

A minute later Mrs. Morrison entered.

"It has grown very dark," she said. "I think we shall have a thunderstorm. It may have been the closeness of the air that has made Pug so sleepy all day. It is time to dress."

Olive got up.

"Very likely," she said. "I have all but finished the fifth mat, and I shall be up to time if I get to the end of it to-morrow."

"I am sure it must be the thunderstorm coming up that makes Pug sleepy," said her mother. "I felt sleepy myself, but I enjoyed my drive. The Park was very full. I saw a great many people whom I knew. Some days one sees a great many people one knows, and other days hardly anybody. Margery was in the Row riding. It is very odd to ride in the evening. I did not speak to her."

There was a slight pause.

"Did she see you?" asked Olive.

CHAPTER X

WALTER MORRISON arrived in England on the first day of August, traveling straight back from Athens, where he was Third Secretary of the Legation, without having encountered any inconvenience from the massacres and that sort of thing, which his mother had feared. The tall, good-looking boy, quiet, serene, and practical in the conduct of life, had grown into a quiet, wholesome-looking young man, the sort of man who, at a guess, would be useful in panics and earthquakes. For it seemed clear at a glance that his quietness was the legitimate expression of strength, just as restlessness and violence are so often the superficial sign of inborn weakness. By his face and manner of movement it might have been reasonably guessed that he was more than twenty-two — indeed, it was true that his character had grown to greater breadth than his figure, which was still notably slim and boyish. But the possible danger of his growing into merely a pretty and spoiled young man, alluded to in an earlier chapter of this history, was already averted. His face had developed a certain firmness and gravity which redeemed it from that risk, physically speaking, while psychologically it indicated that in spite of his great good looks, his youth, and his extremely prosperous circumstances, there was somewhere a grit in his character that would not easily be ground down into the pulp out of which complacent and self-satisfied men are made.

His mother and Olive were at Ballards when he arrived there late one night, and the former, after long processes of absurd and silly thought, was prepared to give him a quantity of rather erroneous information about Margery and her married life, in case he wished to hear about her. Walter, though he had been a very regular correspondent to her during his year's absence from England, had given no hint in his letters of the state of his feelings toward Margery, but his mother felt herself quite competent to judge, as soon as she saw him, whether he had got over his inexplicable attachment to her or not. That attachment, she felt, was the solitary thing she did not understand about Walter; she believed she knew all there was to be known about him in every other respect. This happy conclusion is often reached by those who are completely ignorant of the topic they imagine that they are perfectly acquainted with.

Walter had been his quiet, normal, cheerful self at dinner, and his mother's eagle eye remarked both this and the fact that he ate an excellent meal.

"How good house-food tastes after train-food," he said. "I came straight through by the Indian mail from Brindisi; two days of train-food, all a little gritty."

"They have a new cook at Elmhurst," said Olive, in a monotonous voice.

Mrs. Morrison tried to turn the subject; her plan was not to talk about Margery at all till she got her son alone after dinner. To this end she proposed to fix a headache on to Olive about half-past nine. So with great promptitude she said:

"Cooks are very hard to get this year. I am sure if Mrs.

Robson left us, I do not know where I should turn for another. It is not so with footmen; I have had two second footmen leaving within the last six months, and supplied their places without the least difficulty. Do people have footmen in Athens, Walter?"

Walter laughed.

"Dear mother, you will think of Athens as a sort of barbarous town. It is not the least barbarous. I have no doubt there are stillroom maids there. Yes, Olive, I heard from Margery the day I left Athens, and she mentioned the fact of their new cook. He is a Frenchman, and she says he considers them barbarous because they will not eat snails. Margery writes exactly as she talks; one could fancy one heard her saying it all."

"She writes very untidily," said Olive. "I remember receiving a note from her in June which was very difficult to read. There was a blot, too, as big as a sixpence in the middle of the page. I remember that, because I bought a stylograph for her next day, which I shall give her on her birthday."

"They have been down there all July, have they not?" asked he.

Mrs. Morrison gave up the attempt to shift the subject away from Margery. Mentally, also, she discounted the fact that Walter appeared cheerful and normal. He was evidently thinking a great deal about Margery, and his cheerfulness might be forced. She felt tremendously acute in thinking of that; his manner would have deceived almost anybody but her.

"Yes, they went there on the last day of June," she said.

"No; it would be the last day but two, thirty days hath — yes, on the twenty-eighth, because that was a Saturday, and we had dined there on the twentieth, which I know was a Friday. It was very strange their leaving London so suddenly ——"

"It was not sudden," said Olive. "Margery had told us they were going at least a month before."

"That makes it no less strange. Olive dear, you are looking as if one of your headaches were coming on. I should advise you to go to bed very soon after dinner, and I will send you up some phenacetin. Yes, such a queer plan, and all the account of it that Margery could give me — or perhaps I had better say all the account that she did give me, though pray, Walter, do not understand me to mean that I accuse Margery of being secretive — was that Arnold wanted to get on with his work. And when I said that considering the Greeks and Romans had waited two thousand years for Arnold to write about them — I put it very strongly; just like that, so that she might understand — there would be no harm in their waiting a month more, she had nothing to say to it."

Walter laughed again.

"But surely it was not a question of how long they could wait, but how long Arnold could wait," he said. "If he was to wait a couple of thousand years, like them, he probably would not get much work done."

Mrs. Morrison shook her head.

"It was not that," she said; "it was the strangeness of their going away in July. For Margery — I do not blame her in the least, and I am sure I should have been doing the

same all those years, if it was not that my principles tell me that life does not wholly consist in dances and dinners and suppers — Margery was here, there, and everywhere, and her engagement book was as big as an atlas. The space of a single day, I am sure, would have served me for a week, and Olive too, and such a whirl as we were in all the time you never saw. Often and often I should have cut short my drive, and rested before dinner instead, if it had not been that I had to give Pug his airing. But I do not pretend to understand Margery — indeed, I scarcely set eyes on her. Olive and I dined there twice, but she had no time to come to my musical party, though she knew it must be about June nineteenth. And then to leave London in the thick of it all, and bury herself and Arnold here in the country, and find nothing to say except that he wanted to work, is a thing which is outside my comprehension, though it may only be that I am stupid. But Olive thought it very strange, too, and, as a rule, when Olive and I agree about a thing, you will not find that we make many mistakes. Or perhaps Olive is very stupid also. But if that is so, it is the first that I, for one, have heard about it. Let us go into the drawing-room, Olive, and Walter shall join us when he has drunk his wine."

Mrs. Morrison had worked her mind up into a species of intermittent fever over the fact that Margery had left town at the end of June. She thought a little about it every day, which, so to speak, caused a slight rise in temperature, but the attack really came on when she spoke about it. She made a rule never to reconsider her conclusion, for she was one of those fortunate people who say they have an instinct

so that they can judge people at first sight correctly, and she had made up her mind in the first instance that the Levesons' conduct was strange. Nothing, therefore, could shake her conviction; and since the reason given her was, for some reasons, profoundly unsatisfactory, she argued that there must be another. She had made a guess or two about this, and prepared to tell Walter what her private belief was, when she gave Olive the headache she had already hinted at.

Walter very soon followed them, and found Olive already immersed in woolwork, and her mother still, so to speak, on the boil. But it was not quite time to give Olive her headache yet, and, with great restraint, she spoke of other topics.

"I do not know what your plans are, Walter," she said, "and I hope you will go away where and when you choose and not consider us at all. Olive and I, don't we, dear, intend to stop here all August and rest after the fatigue of London. I don't suppose there was ever anything like the bazaar on the twenty-eighth seen in town, and Olive dined out and so did I after it, and went to Lady Bracton's dance, who is an old friend, though that does not make it less fatiguing. But I dare say you will not find it very lively here"—there was intention in every word Mrs. Morrison spoke to-night, and Bismarck and probably Machiavelli must have turned in their graves from green envy — "and no doubt you will go away and pay some visits. But perhaps you will be back in September when the partridges are fledged or ripe, or whatever you call it. As I say, I am afraid you will not find it lively, with only Olive and me here, and Arnold shutting himself up and seeing nobody. At least, we called

the other day and were told that nobody was in. I don't for a moment say that it was otherwise, but since Margery is my niece, it seemed a little odd."

"Perhaps she was really out," suggested Walter.

"It may have been so, and I hope it was," said Mrs. Morrison, "but one cannot ask the footman, so I do not think it was my fault. I was simply told that they were all out. I have tried to imagine what they could find to do, to be out at four o'clock of an afternoon, when, if it was not actually raining, it seemed likely to rain, so that probably they would not have ventured far. However, that is none of my business, and if Margery chooses to say she is out when she is in, it does not concern me. I ask no questions, and shall not. Perhaps she will explain to me without my asking them what she was doing on that afternoon. But that, Walter, is all the distraction you are likely to meet with here, to be told that Margery and everybody else is out. And it is right to tell you, you will find Arnold very much aged. He struck me as quite an old man when we dined there on the twentieth of June. It was evidently a great strain on him to come on to Lady Bracton's dance afterward, and every one said how changed he looked."

Walter was a patient and indulgent boy, and made all due allowance for nonsense. But it was really impossible not to ask a question here.

"Who said he looked changed?" he asked. "Were they friends of his — I mean, people who knew him?"

Mrs. Morrison smiled kindly.

"Dear boy," she said, "how can I be expected to remember who talked about Arnold more than a month ago? You

do not know what London is, or how many people we met and conversed with that evening."

Olive had stopped her work, and was looking at the ceiling. Then she spoke quite quietly and acidly.

"It is odd you don't remember, mother," she said, "because you told me that Lady Bracton's dance was a mere mob, and that you didn't know anybody by sight. You said that Margery should have introduced you to people, although you did not wish to know any of them. Who could it have been? I am sure it was not me."

Mrs. Morrison faced round toward Olive. The clock had already struck ten, and it was probably slow.

"No, dear," she said, "since you say it was not you, that is sufficient. But you are looking very tired; I said one of your dreadful headaches was coming on, and I am sure it is so. The longer you sit up at night the more you will suffer in the morning. Wish Walter good-night, dear, and I will come to see how you are when I go to bed."

"But I have not got a headache," said Olive.

Then she became a shade more acid and obliging.

"But since you want to talk to Walter alone," she said, "I will finish my wool in the smoking-room. Or, if Walter wants to smoke, I will finish it here. If you would only say what you wish, mother, I will fall in with it. But I have not got a headache, and I do not want to go to bed."

This was tactless, but Mrs. Morrison had lots of tact. It often seemed to her strange that Olive, who was like her in many ways, should be so painfully dissimilar here. Probably she took after her father. That likelihood often presented itself to Mrs. Morrison as accounting in her children

for defects which she believed herself free from. She believed herself free from a goodly number of defects.

Olive did not often behave like this, and usually accepted her headaches when she was given them. Mrs. Morrison instantly concluded that she was bursting with curiosity as to what she and Walter were going to talk about. Tact was required.

"Well, dear, of course you shall do just as you please, and sit up all night if you think it will do your headache good," she said. "Walter, you will like to smoke, no doubt, so pray go to the smoking-room when you feel inclined, and I will come to wish you good-night when Olive goes to bed. Till then I shall keep her company, and chat to her while she does her work. Then we shall all be happy and comfortable."

Olive was not gifted with sufficient poignancy of nature ever to wish to commit violent actions, and no desire to stab her mother with her crochet-needle so much as entered her head. She was only conscious of a mild satisfaction that she could prevent her mother from talking privately to Walter, but to gratify that it was necessary that she should sit up, a thing that she did not want to do, for though without headache she was sleepy. So it was not long before she said "Good-night" to her mother, who thereupon joined Walter in the smoking-room.

"Olive has gone to bed," she said. "I always know when she has a headache, and the worse it is the more she denies it. She was quite short and irritable with me to-night, but I do not blame her. One must have great self-control not to be rendered peevish by pain. I hope she may not lie awake

half the night. Well, my dear, it is nice to see you again, and I think you will find everything in good order and well looked after."

Walter lit his cigarette with a good deal of care. It did not burn quite evenly, and he took another match to it before he replied.

"I am sure I shall," he said rather absently, "and you and Olive both look well, too. Now, do tell me more about Margery."

This was satisfactory; it was better he should ask.

"Well, dear. I have mentioned, have I not, that extraordinary plan of hers of leaving London in July? Yes. No doubt you will find her, if you see her, a good deal changed. To my mind there was always something flighty about her, and really her head seems to have been turned. She thinks about nothing but her balls and her parties. I should not be surprised if Arnold was bitterly disappointed in his marriage. I have even wondered if he was not ashamed of the way she went on in London, and so took her away."

Walter threw away the cigarette over which he had taken such pains.

"Do you mean that she is not happy?" he asked.

There was something of anxiety, of suspense in his tone, that for the moment checked his mother's garrulous belittling of Margery, and pierced through all the unreal imagining and foolish inventions of her own mind which already deceived herself. There was no mistaking his tone; he asked a question which interested him vitally — it was no chance, wayside interrogation. The voice that asked it *cared*. And superficial, insincere, and ignorant of all great and deep

things as she was, it troubled her. She wanted Walter's happiness, she wanted him also to marry (especially if he married "well," as she called it). And she was afraid he was still thinking about Margery.

But there the incomparable limitation of her nature came in, and she judged that by far the best thing she could do was, by wealth of vague fabrications, to convince him how little worthy was Margery of his anxiety or care. The subject fired her, for with a good object in view, namely, Walter's disillusionment, she could discharge all her petty spite. And as a fine nature, under the kindling of enthusiasm, will out-roar itself, so she dropped below herself with this admixture of maternal affection for her son and spiteful dislike of Margery to inspire her.

"I do not think for a moment that she is not happy," she said. "It is true that I saw but little of her in London, for with all her new fine friends she found little time for us, but when I did see her she seemed to be in the best spirits. No, poor fellow, it was of him I was thinking. Margery" — and she brought the words out with papal authority — "has a shallow nature. Now, he has not; however he may have behaved to poor Olive, I do not accuse him of shallowness, for look at all the thought and care he spends over the history of the Greeks and Romans. Not that she has not often shown cunning — I always knew she was cunning — for look at the way she flattered him over that Egyptian book until he thought that she was interested and gave her a copy. That was the beginning of her pursuit of him. But cunning often goes with shallowness. And as if that were not enough, look at the way she treated you, drawing you on, making up

to you, for you were but a boy, and a generous and warm-hearted one always, so that in case her schemes about Arnold went wrong ——"

But Walter had had enough. His mother's zeal had left discretion out of sight. This last accusation against Margery was as infamous and as false as Satan. His whole honest soul burst into flame at the wanton insult. And by the light of that he judged the rest of his mother's speech and estimated the truth of it. And the strength of his feeling made his quietness the deeper.

"Ah, I think you had better stop," he said. "It would be wiser not to say any more, mother, because I want to forget that it is you who have said what you have just said. It is not the case that Margery drew me on, made up to me, that and all the rest. I do not want a single further word on the subject, and I will not listen to one."

Walter moved across to the table where stood soda-water and whiskey, and as he poured himself out some the lip of the bottle clattered against the glass, for his hand was trembling. That was the only sign that he showed of his white-hot indignation, and his mother (with all her knowledge of him) utterly missed it all.

"Well, to be sure," she said, "you ask me about Margery, and before I've told you half you say you won't listen to another word ——"

"That is so," said he quietly. "Shall we talk about something else? Or, it is late already, and I think after two nights in the train I shall go to bed."

Then the inherent gentleness in his nature, the compassion that simple-hearted people have for those who, like

spiders, spin bitter webs out of their own imaginings, the pity of the kind and strong for those who are malicious only out of a sort of vacuous malice, come to his aid. There was no good in being angry; besides, she was his mother.

"And to-morrow I must make my plans, mother dear," he said. "I think I shall stop here for most of my leave, for I shall find plenty to do. I want to see all that has been going on in the farm and the woods."

He kissed his mother.

"I thought you would want to do that," she said again triumphing in her own thoughtfulness, "and I have told the agent to be here by eleven to-morrow morning."

Walter meant to ride over to see Margery to-morrow, but there was no need to say that just now. He lit her candle for her, and they went upstairs.

Margery, much as she had enjoyed the riotous weeks in town, had spent a delicious July in the quiet of the country, for she had by no means left her faculty for enjoyment in the deserted house in Portman Square. Arnold's mother had been with them for a week, and was coming again during the course of August, but otherwise she had seen practically nobody except her husband, and for a large part of the day had seen nothing of him. That was just as it should be. They had come down here in order that he should get some weeks of uninterrupted work, and it was her business to give him the conditions he needed. But she had not quite known how serious and secluded an affair his work was, and at the beginning it had been necessary for her to adjust her ideas a little on the subject. In her mind she had pictured herself spending the mornings and the hours of his industry

(in the intervals of the piano-practice which she had laid down for herself) with him in his study, looking out references for him, watching the progress of his pages, seeing the flawless paragraphs come hot from the mint of his exquisite mind. For a morning or two she had followed her pictured ideal, playing a little, then perhaps going in to him, bright-eyed and silent, to put some fresh flowers on his table, or to settle herself in the window-seat to read the paper, retailing to him any scraps that she thought would interest him. Another day she had established herself in a corner of his work-table and wrote her letters there with busy, scratching pen and borrowings of his blotting-paper.

It was on this particular morning during the first week that they were there that she had to readjust her notions.

"Seven letters since breakfast!" she said triumphantly. "It does make me so industrious when I see somebody else working too. How are you getting on, dear?"

Arnold at the moment was trying to remember three separate pages he wished to turn to, and Margery's interruption made him forget them all. A little impatient click of his tongue on his teeth escaped him.

"Darling, it is delightful, quite delightful, to have you here," he said, "but do you mind not talking? I have to look up the index again. No, I'm not getting on very well."

"Oh, let me look it up for you," said Margery.

"No, you can't, thanks," said he rather sharply.

Margery looked at him a moment in silence, all her love for him quickening her comprehension. But she waited till he had finished a note he was making. Then she spoke.

"Oh, Arnold," she said. "Will you promise to tell me the truth?"

"Yes, dear, certainly," he said. (Margery thought he had finished making his note, but he had not.)

"Well, then, would you rather I didn't come in here and sit with you?" she said. "Do I disturb you by being here?"

"Yes, dear, you do," he said.

"Oh, I *am* sorry. I thought we were having such a nice time. And what a silly boy you are not to have told me sooner. Good-bye, till lunch."

"Margery, you don't mind, do you?" he asked.

"I only mind my having been such a goose!" she said.

There was further enlightenment yet to come. She asked after his progress at lunch, hoping that her removal of herself would have helped matters.

"No, I seem to have stuck rather," he said. "Or perhaps it is that I have not made a real beginning yet."

He paused a moment.

"What was that delicious thing you had such a good practice at this morning?" he asked.

Again love prompted her. She told him, but from that day the piano was dumb. He did not allude to its cessation, though she hoped he would, for she felt quite certain that he had noticed it. But she told herself it was *exigeante* of her to expect it. It was enough that she could remove all hindrances without having the service acknowledged. She might, so she told herself, as well expect him every day to thank her for ordering dinner.

The book on which he was engaged was designed to be on a scale far exceeding anything he had yet done, for it was

to be on "The Age of Pericles," compared to which the Alexandrian volume was but a sketch, a study. He had already shelves of note-books filled with patient scholarly work on the various branches of his subject; notes on the political history, notes on the drama, on the arts, on the myriad petals, so to speak, that went to make up that wonderful and perfect flower. Already by the end of the month he had set up the skeleton of his work; and the grouping of chapters with the mere enumeration of their contents was no thin harvest for those weeks. Then would come the patient cataloguing of the notes, the authorities, the references which must contribute to each separate one of those numerous headings; they — as he explained to Margery — were the muscles and sinews of his figure; then, last of all, like the smooth shining skin swelling and falling, lying in myriad beautiful curves, each representing muscle and bone in the structure beneath, would come the writing of the book. How long would it take? He could not possibly tell.

And so the month had passed; the bones had been knitted together, and the work of the muscle-building was beginning. As has been said, Margery had to adjust her original conception of the manner of her days, she had also to learn, and had learned it without any touch of bitterness, what a tremendous hold his work had on him. It seemed completely to absorb him, and after those months when he had been so thoroughly absorbed in her the change was rather violent. She would not have had it different, for it was Arnold all the time; only — only she had thought of that book which he had given her, as being not the patient, absorbed, laborious building that it was, but as just the shower of iridescent drops

that some swift-winged water bird throws off as it rises into the air. It had seemed just the emanation, the unconscious aura, of his mind when it dwelt on the days of Theocritus, or at the most its honey, the glad romantic harvesting of its bees. But it could not really have been so; it was the endless, patient labour of that mind; the grim, day-long toil of its honey-seekers.

In all this there was nothing that could really trouble her, and she spent a delicious July, self-effacing and content. One thing alone sometimes moved with disquieting steps in the sweet shady places of her mind, and that was the recollection of a day when he had told her how she herself had at first been to him no more than one of his Tanagra figurines, how by degrees she had grown incarnate to him. Now she had, as by the sun's rays, put to flight the classical shadows where he had dwelt. And now and then (though as often as it occurred she banished the idea) she found herself wondering if those classical shadows were not trooping up again. This did not represent itself to her in any light of neglect; it was simply that his work absorbed him. What work, too! More beautiful perhaps than ever to her now that she knew how much, how essentially his work was *him* — no airy shaken shower of wings, but the patient and fragrant harvest of untiring day-long quests. In matter of brain and production it was certainly summer for him (now that she had learned not to sit in his room or play the piano while he was at work), and it was little wonder that he and his working-bees were busy with the gathering of the honey. It was for their queen — so she loyally phrased it to herself — that they were gathering it. The work of his brain

was hers, for he was hers body and soul; all that he garnered, pushing busily among his books, as they among flowers, came home to her, whether he knew it or not. Some time he would know it, when the honey was gathered, the book written, for he would find it written in her heart. The passion of the scholar, the hunt for honey, all came back to the hive.

It was with no effort that Margery imagined these things; it required no effort for her to think of herself as sitting at home, busy with the household affairs, while he, absorbed in his work, pursuing it with the blind instinct of the bee, really brought it all home to her. Nor did it require more effort to banish the thought of the classical shades trooping back again. She was his wife, the chosen one of his brain no less than his heart. And she looked forward, with a poignant expectancy that altogether banished the filmy notion that she was undergoing a temporary banishment, to the time when the brain and muscles of the book would be in place, and evening by evening she would hear what had been written, see that supple skin that clothed muscle and bone. And what added to the sweetness of that expectation was the knowledge that she herself contributed to it. For in a drawer of that working-table of his were little slips of paper, on each of which was written some vivid phrase that had by chance found utterance and was noted down. Often it was his own sentence that took his fancy when it was said, a sentence that came from his mouth by chance when they were riding together. Such phrases were of common occurrence. "The tired green of the sunburnt downs" was an instance. He had said it quite naturally and sponta-

neously as they crossed on their homeward journey a broad back of Surrey hills. Then he had said, "Can you remember that, Margery? I should like to put it in the phrase-drawer." The place was familiar to her by his account; for there was a drawer in his table full of such little paper slips, and in the writing of his book they, as he told her, were constantly spread out before him, so that when some such expressive turn was needed he glanced at them, often finding something that fitted the need. There were many of her phrases there; she loved to think that they might appear in the golden paragraphs, would be tesseræ in the exquisite mosaic of his writing.

But all the time, though the book progressed, and the phrases accumulated, though all her desire was set on his desire, she had been rather lonely. There was no need for her to tell herself that in every way she loved to serve in the making of this book, for she knew that in the innermost fibre of her heart, and her loneliness, she ecstatically cancelled from any account, since for him, as he said, about the time that July entered its last week, the conditions of work were perfect. To her the satisfaction at that absolutely overruled all other considerations. But, provided it did not disturb him, or upset the exquisite equilibrium, she would have been glad of more human intercourse. His mother had been here for a week, and during those days, provided Arnold's book went well, she wanted nothing more. But for the last fortnight Margery had scarcely spoken a word to a living soul except her husband and the servants. Once a couple of neighbours had come to lunch, at her invitation, but even that a little upset Arnold, for they had stayed on

talking, and he had not been able to go out with her for their ride at the usual hour. Yet there had been soul-manna to her in that also, for when eventually they set off he had said, "I never want to see anybody but you." How infinitely the sweetness of that outweighed the fact that she would have rather liked to see other people.

Margery was sitting this morning beneath the big elms at the end of the lawn with a couple of collies rather prostrated with the heat, lying panting by her. The day was still and windless, so that no whisper of movement came from the towers of close-growing leaf above her, but all round the full chorus of summer was open-throated. She had sent out a table and chair, with the design of answering her morning's letters, but as yet she had not set to work. Above she was shielded by the elms, and a thicket of syringa lay between her and the drive that led to the house, while in front stretched the yellowing grass of the lawn, and beyond this lay blazing flower-beds which ran below the drawing-room and Arnold's study. Even from here she could hear the continuous murmur of the bees busy in the open chalices of the flowers, and butterflies, those silent but less earnest honey-seekers, hovered and flitted and poised. There was but little bird-music in the air, but from some tree in the field beyond the lawn a couple of pigeons made guttural caressing moans. Jack and Jill, the two collies lying by her, panted with drooping tongues, raised chins, and half-closed eyes, like twin steam-engines. For a few breaths they would keep admirable time, then Jill, hotter than her friend or less voluminous-lunged, gained a little, and after another dozen or so of pants would be in time with Jack again. All these

things Margery noticed lazily and contentedly; they were all good, safe sights and sounds, charged with the feeling of home, but, lazy and content though she was, she would have liked somebody to be lazy with. A little while ago she had heard the muffled beat of a cantering horse's hoofs on the rough grass on the farther side of the drive, but had not troubled to look through the screen of syringa to see who it was.

And then there came the sound of a foot on the crisp gravel, that somehow arrested her attention, for it was strangely familiar, and next moment round the clump of sweet-flowering bushes came Walter. Then with both hands outstretched she rose quickly, upsetting her chair.

"Walter, Walter, dear!" she cried.

"Why, Margery," he said.

He held both those dear hands of hers a moment.

"They told me you were out here," he said, "so I came to see. And I found you again."

Jack and Jill had risen too, and made a circle of polite but careful inquiry around him. They decided he would do well enough, and lay down to pant again.

"You came back when? Yesterday?" asked she. "It was dear of you to come over and see me at once. How brown and strong you look! Oh, Walter, it is good to see you."

"Thanks ever so much. And Arnold? Am I not to see him?"

"Not now; you are to see me. It's sacred work-time, and I don't even tell him if there are earthquakes. Such a book as it's going to be. I am so proud of it."

"Are you alone?" asked he.

"Yes, and dreadfully glad I'm not alone this minute. I'm going to talk to you the whole morning."

"And I shall stop to lunch, please."

Margery's eyes clouded; then they appealed.

"I'm going to say something dreadful," she said. "But promise not to mind. I'm not sure if you can stop to lunch. This is what happened: the other day two or three people came to lunch and they remained talking, and Arnold couldn't get out for our ride till late, and his work was upset. But let us wait till one. Arnold stops working at one, and we shall see at once. I dare say he will want you to stop. Oh, Walter, it's only because you are such a dear that I tell you that. If you weren't I should instantly ask you to stop and apologize to Arnold afterward if necessary."

He laughed.

"What a lot of words," he said. "Of course I understand. And I wouldn't upset Arnold's work for the world. He wouldn't like the sight of me, or want me to come again. That would never do!"

"Not for me," said Margery. "Oh, dear, I am glad you have come. I didn't want a solitary morning in the least, and as for all the letters I meant to answer ——"

Margery shut them up in her blotting-book, and firmly and decisively strapped it up.

"So much for them," she observed.

Walter had seated himself on the grass by her chair, in these first moments feeling nothing except that it was just all to be with Margery again. Often, during this last year, he had pictured to himself his next meeting with her, and

though he had never ceased to long for it, he had always dreaded it. He had left England some months before her marriage, and knew that when he saw her next she would be another man's wife, and he could make no guess how hard to bear, how bitter, even, that might be. Often he had wondered whether it would be wiser not to see her again for the present, or only in such public ways as could prevent the old intimacy, its growing desires, and its frustrated hopes, establishing itself again, and often he had told himself that such was the clear injunction of prudence and wisdom. Yet all the time he knew well what was the magnet that so constantly pulled him homeward, the invisible sweet face stretching overseas and laying hands on him in the town of blue sky and white marble, and how much stronger and more compelling was that than all the maxims of prudence. And, behold, it proved that prudence (or so he thought now) was but a cautious and timorous counsellor, full of fears where no fear was, for here was he now flying straight in the face of its dried admonitions, as he sat on the grass at Margery's feet, and there was nothing hard to bear, nothing bitter at all; it was only unutterably sweet to be with her again. She was just Margery — Margery, the friend of his soul, and who, as he well knew, had so deep and tender an affection for him.

"Well, so that's done," he said. "Now you may begin; tell me all about it."

She laughed. This had been the invariable formula when he returned home from Eton for the holidays.

"Oh, a ripping time," she said, falling back into the old words. "Absolutely A1. And if this morning I had been

given my choice, as to who should come and see me, it would have been you, you, you; first, second, and third. I had a tremendous time in town; I had no idea there were so many nice people in the world. Then we came down here, and Arnold has been working. There's simply nothing to tell you; it's all so good. You next."

"Also A1. Every one friendly and kind, and you never saw anything half so funny as the Athens golf-links, and the Athenian players. Mixed foursomes chiefly with heaps of conversation. She taps the ball gently from the tee, and every one says, '*Mon Dieu, quel drive! Magnifique!*' and then we have tea. Oh, but such a place, Margery; you never saw such beauty, and I'm getting quite a professional at temples, architrave, peritonitis, no, not quite that, perisotasis, I think, metope triglyph, all the whole show. You and Arnold must really come out and see me."

"But the very thing," said she. "Why, it's Pericles he is working on. Oh, Walter, it's going to be so good. He's building, building. How heavenly it must be to create like that. And he makes music out of history. And I am glad you have had a nice time," she added, with an inconsequence that was superficial only.

The morning passed but too quickly, and Margery was incredulous when she heard the stable-clock strike one, and shortly after saw her husband coming across the lawn to find her. He was genuinely pleased to see Walter, and mingled with his pleasure was a kindly delicate pity for the young man, who had ridden over on the very first morning at home to see his wife. It did not strike him as wise, for the very haste and immediateness of the visit showed the

fact that this was unwisdom; but it was youthful, eager, and unthinking. He was pleased for Margery's sake, too; she was evidently overjoyed to see her friend again. Then, surprised that she had not already asked him to lunch, he gave the invitation himself, and as they were to stroll for half-an-hour, she went back to the house to fetch her hat, for he would not let her expose her head to the glare, and she left the two together.

"You have come from Athens, too, you lucky fellow," he said. "I would have given a great deal to have half-an-hour in Athens this morning. One's eyes are so much more informing than fifty maps to scale. Really, I think I must get out there in the autumn. How do you think Margery looks?"

"Never saw her looking better," said Walter. "And never happier."

"I am glad you think so. Are you going to stop at Ballards some time?"

"Most of my leave, I expect. The best part of two months."

"You must come over often, very often, then," he said. "As Margery will probably have told you, I am working hard, and she sees nobody. You can well understand how disturbing strangers are, when one is in the throes of production. And though I don't think she feels lonely, for I really believe she is as interested in my book as I am, companionship is a natural need. So do come just when you feel inclined, if you will give me the luxury of not treating you like a stranger, and doing my work and taking exercise at regular hours."

The speech was sufficiently cordial and welcoming. It showed thought, too, for Margery. But it struck Walter that it showed more thought for himself — showed it instinctively, unconsciously, as if it was a habit.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS a morning later in August — a hot, still morning very like that on which, nearly a month ago, Walter had made his first appearance at Elmhurst. Since then he had not hesitated to take advantage of the cordiality of his welcome, and the days on which he had not met Margery had been few, and the days on which he had met Arnold had been only slightly less numerous. Throughout he had behaved like the simple honest soul that he was: he knew himself to be in love with Margery: he knew her to be in love with her husband, and accepted the situation in the true sense of the word. These things were so; to meddle with them, even in thought, was a kind of sacrilege, and he accepted them not with resignation — a poor quality, in his opinion — but with an eager desire to make the most of them, to extract from them, not for himself only, nor for himself first, but for Margery and him, the final ounce of happiness which they were capable of yielding. He knew correctly, neither more nor less, the quality of Margery's affection for him, and he neither strained nor starved it. On the one hand, that is to say, he never hinted at, or let appear in the most remote horizon of their intercourse, his love for her — he tried with all the struggling fibres of his being to bring back the "note" of his boyish affection for her, since that was best suited to her feeling for him. The natural inevitable deepening of age had been added to it, but, limpet-

like, he clave to that rock, for that was the best he could do. To hint at, to imply for a moment, the sweet impossible "might have been," was to strain her affection and make her sorry. On the other hand, he did not starve it, though in certain ways that would have been the easier course. For it was so easy to starve it. He had but to stop away, to fail to take advantage of his welcome to Elmhurst, while he still stayed at home, and she must have understood. But he steered for the narrow straits, avoiding Scylla and Charybdis, not letting his love be manifest to her, either by direct sign or by the no less unmistakable indirectness of banishing himself.

But it must not be supposed that he was without his consolations. To him, to the quality of his love, the best possible — seeing that things were as they were and not otherwise — was to see her, to talk with her, to be on the dear familiar terms. There was torture in it all, but he accepted that, deciding, as he had every right to do, that that concerned him alone, provided only he quite concealed from her the uncomfortable appearance which his pain would have presented. And the attitude was not bloodless, though the rough and ready methods of ignorant people might have condemned it as such. The rough and ready method would have prompted him to say: "I love you, and if you don't love me, I will shoot grouse. Yes or no." Another method only slightly less rough and ready would have been to absent himself, and let her draw inevitable conclusions. But he did neither. He made himself the Walter of old days, and saw much of his friend Margery. But for him it was no bloodless pose; daily and nightly he bled with it. But his blood was his own, and he chose to spend it.

Private, too, was the expense; for Margery, absorbed as she certainly was in Arnold, never guessed it. It was a triumph of dissimulation on his part. There was never less of a coquette than she; she saw only her dear friend, one who had once wanted to be much more to her, returning as her dear friend, ripened, softened, she knew not what, but no other than the old dear Walter. And considering the skill with which he played this difficult, dangerous game, it was no wonder that she was deceived. Her affection was his, though her heart was her husband's, and through all these August days she never guessed that it was not a smooth boyish mouth that spoke to her of present interests and renewed memories, but the heart of a man that so shrewdly hid itself, and borrowed the mask of his own face to use and to speak through.

Naturally there were hours for Walter, many of them, when he could not help reviewing the whole situation, and wondering whether it would not be better — not wiser merely — to cut off the ravelled thread, instead of strengthening it. And in these reflections Margery's husband had necessarily to be a figure of prominence, he and his book and his quiet uninterrupted mornings, and his punctual ride, and all the protective apparatus with which he must be surrounded in order that he should produce an affair of a few hundred pages with which so small a section even of the world which called itself cultivated would ever concern itself. Sometimes the notion enraged him, when he fancied to himself the idea of being Margery's husband, and letting anything else in the world concern him. Who was Pericles? What did the ancient Athenians matter to one who had

Margery for wife? It might have been excusable for himself to attempt, with however small success, to fuddle his brain with learning, since the one great thing was denied him, but by what possible code of reason could a man who loved Margery neglect her, for it came to no less than that, for the pursuit of dry knowledge and wandering about in the age of Pericles instead of living in the age of gold? Margery was less controlled an actor than Walter, and it was abundantly plain to him, as those hot weeks of August ran their course, that she had lonely hours, though fewer now that he was here. But if Margery had been his, he knew that if there was any desire for lonely hours, the cry would have come from her.

And then in intervals he did better justice to Arnold, and saw, surprising as it may sound, that in essentials he was a great man. Those six months of idleness from work, which Margery had told him of, showed that he was in love with her, and that he was in love with her still he had no reason to doubt. But Arnold was in love with learning; he, though Margery was his wife, could arrange his day for the pursuit of knowledge. Soldier, sailor, student, whatever a man was, he was right to do his work. There was Nelson and Lady Hamilton: if he had been a small man he would have let Trafalgar take care of itself. It was because he was big that he put his work before his love. Love would always take care of itself. . . . Yet not that. Love was itself; light shone, and meantime work had to be done, whether it was patriotic, or classical, or historical. The important thing was to believe in it. And only the big folk of the world believed in it. Others would work for other reasons, be-

cause they were paid to work, because from its successful accomplishment they got honour and orders and glory and garters, or on a higher plane because they brought territory to their country, and planted the flag in unreasonably inaccessible places. Yet there was a higher plane even than that: there were those who worked for love of knowledge, who explored, not to gain territory for themselves or even for others, but to show its existence merely. Those were the great ones, and though to Walter the age of Pericles meant no more than the existence of certain most picturesque ruins and the survival of certain plays, he saw that to Arnold there was some remote quarry there, which he pursued in ardent lonely single-handed chase. He would have pursued it with the same ardour, Walter felt sure, if his work were never to see the light, if he was never, continuing the metaphor, to bring back into the market-place the skins of unknown birds, the horns of unconjectured animals. It was there that he was great, and thus it was to no second-rate achiever that Margery subordinated herself. Besides she loved him: there the last word was said.

So he did Arnold full justice; his justice, if anything, erred on the side of generosity, for, granting him greatness in respect of his devotion to an idea, he was willing to cancel from the other side a hundred littlenesses. Arnold's single and simple aim excused them, and if he was needlessly careful about not exerting himself too much in their rides during the afternoon for fear it would fatigue him and prevent his giving his acutest attention to his work after tea, if he pondered as to whether cream did not "upset" him, if he was overcareful in his wish that Margery and Walter should not play

croquet below his windows, since he could not help waiting for the sound of the impact of ball and mallet, these meticulous trifles were all connected with the single idea. And if he let Margery look after and amuse herself all July, not letting her have guests in the house because they would upset the Medi-Persian regularity of his day, this, though most inhuman, most unlover-like, was still intelligible.

Such, in brief, had been the psychic atmosphere of Elmhurst all August, and the month had passed, so to speak, without gales or storms of any kind. Once or twice, but not oftener, Margery had been over to Ballards, but even that had been hard to arrange. Arnold altogether refused to dine out in the evening, and it was impossible for Margery to leave him alone. Nor could he get over there for lunch, since in order to do that he would have to stop work before one, if he rode there, while, if he motored, he would get no stroll before lunch and no ride afterward. And again she could not leave him to stroll and lunch and ride alone. Once or twice she had let him look after himself for an hour or two, but it was not an experiment to repeat. And if she was wrong in not having a little independence, in not taking a little liberty, and at the same time giving him a chance to be rather more manly and self-reliant in such minutiæ, it was because she loved him, and could not bear that in any way, even in the fringes and skirts of conduct, her self-surrender to him should be less than complete. And to her nature it was, as it were, an exquisite self-indulgence, a priceless luxury to be to him all that she could in things great and minute alike. Yet there was no such scale really, for all the acts done in the service of love are equal. The cup of

cold water is no less than the giving of the body to be burned.

And if occasionally, occasionally and vaguely she felt (though only to dismiss the thought) as if he put his work, though only now and only temporarily before her, she had for the last week or two been cherishing a secret of overpowering sweetness, a charm which, when he knew it, would surely cause him to show, if only by a word or a look, how utterly mistaken any such fugitive imaginations were. But she had to be certain of the genuineness of her secret first, and on this last morning of August she was certain. She knew.

Arnold had gone to his work as usual at ten, for his old custom of beginning at half-past had been abandoned owing to the stress and ardour of this new book, in favour of an extra half hour, and Margery had asked Dr. Appleby to come and see her at half-past ten, so that Arnold should not know of his visit, for he would then be immersed in his work. By soon after eleven the doctor had just gone, and Margery, dim-eyed and smiling, her heart full of a happiness transcending all thought, all imagination, sat for a little while alone in her bedroom, letting the glow, the joy of what she had been told sink into herself, before she went to Arnold. Never for more than six weeks now had she or any one gone into his room during these sacred hours, and she pictured to herself how he would look up, surprised, certainly, and (she almost hoped) vexed at her interruption. Perhaps she would even tease him for a moment or two first; say she had just come in to see how he was getting on, and would he not leave his work and play croquet with her? How he would stare, frown, open his eyes in sheer wonder. And then she would

run to him, hide her face on his shoulder, and tell him. . . . If ever during these months she had thought herself a little neglected, how in that moment would he wipe clean from her mind any possibility of such thought! To-day, too, Walter was coming over to lunch. But she and Arnold would have their secret from him. Even Walter must not know.

Soon she went downstairs. All was as silent in the house as if it had been the timeless hour before dawn, but through the open door and open windows there poured in the warm fragrance of the flowering and fruitful summer and west wind into which had been distilled the smell of newly-mown grass, of crimson rose, of sweet peas, and all the scents of the summer garden. Not far from the front door was a clump of pines; their keen aroma was mingled there too. Margery drank a couple of long breaths of it in, then she opened the door of Arnold's study (and even as she opened it, a sense of most remote stillness seemed to come out) and entered.

So absorbed was he that he did not notice the opening of the door, and Margery was half-way across the room before he looked up. And having looked up and seen her, he looked back again instantly to his paper, on which he was copying out a couple of references from one of his note-books.

"Surely it is not one yet?" he asked.

"No, Arnold," said she, abandoning the idea of teasing him first.

"You want to speak to me?" he said, still not looking up, but going on writing. "What is it then, dear?"

Margery had come close to him, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Ah, please stop writing a moment!" she said.

"I am attending to you, my dear," he said, but without stopping.

He did not know yet; it was not as if he knew. She knelt down by him, and pressed her face to his arm.

"Arnold, I am with child," she said. "God is sending us a child."

There were but three figures more to copy: he had already written down *Soph. Ocd Col*, and he added the number of the line, 668. Then he laid down his pen on the blotting-paper.

"My darling," he said, "that is beautiful news. Dear me! Beautiful news. You must give me a kiss."

He turned sideways from his table, but did not get up, and, taking her face in his hands, kissed her twice very tenderly.

"You have seen Dr. Appleby?" he asked. "You are quite certain?"

She still hoped that some sign would come, some word, some glance from him to show her that in his heart, as in her own, the glory and wonder of her news made morning. She nodded her head to him in answer, and waited.

He gave one quick glance at the clock, then looked back to her again.

"And how delighted mother will be!" he added.

She got up, and walked across to the chimney-piece, her heart still full to bursting, still waiting for him, so to speak, to unlock its sluice-gates, and let the joy pour out, overwhelming him, drowning him. And then with her back to him she waited, thinking that in a moment she must feel his

arms around her, hear but one word, a whisper perhaps, and know that her heart could discharge itself into his. Then he spoke.

"I am overjoyed, overjoyed!" he said. "Will you send a line to mother? She would like to know at once."

And then Margery heard the turning over of the leaf of some book.

At that a sudden bitterness rose within her, sharp and acid, taking its quality from the strength of her joy.

"I am sorry to have interrupted you!" she said. "I will go now."

"But, my darling, what a delicious interruption!" he said, "I should have been quite hurt if you had not told me the moment you knew. We must have a great talk about it all this evening. Thank you, my dearest, for telling me at once!"

Margery left the room quietly, and stood for a minute in the hall outside, still believing that the door of his study must open, that he must come out, and say or do something, she knew not what, that would open their hearts to each other. And belief died into hope, and then hope passed away also. Within his room it was quite still; all the house was still, and he was working.

She went out to her customary seat under the shade of the solemn elms, and sat down there. She asked herself if she was unreasonable, if she expected something that it was not in a man's nature to give her. Was fatherhood so hugely less than motherhood as that, that sort of kiss, that assurance that he was overjoyed, and that his mother would be delighted? How could he so much as think of his mother at

that moment, and how — how could he, while the news was still not more than a couple of minutes old, turn over the leaf of one of his books? Worst of all, he had taken her bitter remark that she was sorry she had interrupted him quite literally, and had assured her she need feel no compunction on that score. If he only had said, "How dare you say that?" she would have known how just his reproach was, and welcomed it. And he proposed to have a great talk over it this evening! There was no need; he might spare himself the pains, for there was nothing more to say. She had told him; he had answered her. Perhaps, after all, that was all that it could mean to a man. If that was so, the whole world might know — Aunt Aggie, Mrs. Leveson, Olive, Walter, the cook, the gardener. There was no sweet secret to keep.

Even yet she could hardly believe it, and, leaving her place, she went down the flower-border that lay below his windows, keeping on the edge of the grass so that he should not hear her footsteps, to see if indeed he was working quietly, industriously as usual. His table was set at an angle to the light, so that it came from his left, and as she passed the first window she had but a back view of him. The fingers of his left hand held back the leaves of some big volume which the breeze would have wished to turn over for him, his head was bent, and his right hand busy. But as she passed the second window, he looked up and saw her.

"My darling, is it wise to walk in the sun without a hat?" he called out. "Pray, to please me, go and put one on."

And then as she answered him, retracing her steps, the

thrice blessed sense of humour, which she by no means lacked, came to her aid, and with it a sudden contrition for her own ingratitude.

She really was a humorous figure, with her prowlings and noiseless footsteps, humorous, too, was the contrast of his real care and tenderness for her with something ecstatic and quite vague, which she had allowed herself to expect. But her contrition was the stronger of the forces, and her involuntary smile at herself quite died away. She, ungrateful little brute, was to be given the crown of her sex and her womanhood, and while the knowledge of that immense and beautiful thing was yet new to her, she had allowed herself to harbour a sense of disappointment, had allowed herself to make a bitter speech, and, worse than that, had allowed herself to feel the bitter thought that prompted it. It was lucky after all, better than she deserved, that Arnold had not noticed it.

It was Walter's custom, when he was coming over to lunch, to arrive at a quite unnecessarily early hour, so that he had a little while alone with Margery before Arnold joined them at one for the stroll before lunch, and to-day it was scarcely after twelve when she, having returned to her elm-tree shade, was joined by him. The collies, accustomed to him by now, gave him a silent greeting of thumping tails, and, as usual, he propped himself against the bole of the elm near Margery's chair, and collected his long legs with clasped hands. But the infallible lover instinct soon told him that something had happened. Margery, though she often had as many moods as April, had something, secret evidently, since she did not speak of it to him, that inwardly absorbed her; for a

couple of minutes she would be voluble, then she suddenly seemed to lose herself, paid no attention perhaps to the answer he gave to a direct question of hers, and sat with soft, dewy eyes looking out farther than the utmost horizon. Then perhaps she repeated the question she had already asked him.

Walter did not stand this for long.

"You have asked me whether mother is well three times now," he observed, "and I have twice told you that she is in excellent health. I can't do more."

Margery suddenly devoted her whole attention to him.

"No, you dear, I know you can't," she said. "Walter, is it wise to sit in the shade on the grass when you are simply dripping? I never saw anybody so hot, and you will be sure to catch cold."

Then her attention completely wandered again.

"It is a nice world!" she observed.

"You have said that twice," he remarked. "You have also said twice that it is our own silly faults if we are ever disappointed about things. I only mention that for fear you should repeat it a third time."

Margery shook her head with a solemn regret.

"But it's quite true," she said. "We spoil things for ourselves, though I suppose sometimes things are really disappointing. It's hard to know when they really are, and when it's only me."

"Have you been out in the sun without a hat?" asked he, making really a quite legitimate deduction from her intense futility.

Margery was perfectly idiotic; she did not notice the in-

tention of his sarcasm at all and nailed a sort of society smile to her face.

"Yes, I took a stroll up and down the lawn, and the sun was very hot," she said. "I do not remember such a powerful sun any day this summer."

Then she babbled again.

"And Arnold asked me to put a hat on, and so I said yes, and didn't, like, oh, like that man in the Bible. I came into the shade again, which surely will do as well."

"Why wasn't Arnold working?" asked Walter.

"He was, and I interrupted him. I mean I went past his windows, and he looked up and saw me. He asked —— "

Margery's voice suddenly sank to a whisper.

"Oh, Walter, look!" she said, pointing with her finger to a tree not far distant.

Two swallows, the parent birds, were wheeling about in small, apparently aimless circles round one of the branches, uttering little encouraging cries. But the circle was not aimless; on a bough sat a young swallow, which they were coaxing into trying to fly. It sat there rather depressed, rather frightened, huddled up into itself. Then, after two or three fruitless efforts, the old birds flew away, hunting, and returned and fed it. Then the little circles and the encouraging cries began again, and at last the young bird took a spring from its bough, and fluttered in the air a moment. Then, growing bolder, it ventured on another flight, fluttering with unnecessary violence, using its wings as a child learning to swim uses its limbs, with splashing and gesticulation.

"O little bird!" said Margery to herself. "Timid little

bird; it is trying, it is learning. How patient and tender they are with it. Oh, Walter, isn't it sweet?"

Margery turned to him, her eyes full of moist brightness, Somehow the sight of the young thing with its anxious encouraging mother had touched her to the heart. And he was quite worthy of the sight, of its romance, its delicious freshness, its simple piercing to the heart of things.

"Oh, ripping!" he said. "It's so young, and they are so good to it. Look, they are feeding it again."

Yes, he understood that; it went home to him. Perhaps her news would go home to him also. Margery did not know whether it was usual for a young wife to tell a young man that she was going to have a baby, and she certainly did not care.

"That somehow touches me so," she said. "I shall soon, know how they feel. I'm going to have a baby, too, Walter dear."

He looked at her in silence a moment, smiling.

"Jolly of you to tell me, Margery!" he said. "I am glad. I've always wanted you to have your heart's desire, you know, as I told you once."

That was it; the words were simple enough, not chosen, not thought out. But she found them all that she had sought in vain from Arnold.

At this moment a most unusual thing happened. The stable clock had only just struck half-past twelve, and here coming across the lawn toward them was her husband. Margery could only remember such a portent as his leaving his work before the scheduled hour occurring once before, and on that occasion he had a headache. It

was not wonderful that she conjectured a similar untowardness now.

"Darling, what has happened?" she asked, rising and going out of the shade to meet him. "You are not ill?"

He smiled at her, looking very well indeed.

"No, dear," he said, speaking low; "but your news, your dear news upset me; I could not attend with my best attention to what I was working at. You came between me and the page. But not for a moment would I have had you keep back your news till the morning's work was over. It would have been a cruel kindness. I shall make a holiday of to-day instead. Ah, there is Walter. Good morning, my dear Walter. Have you indeed ridden over in this blinding heat? And, Margery, Margery, where is the hat you promised me you would put on? You naughty child! Pray go and get it at once. Indeed, you shall not stroll with us without it. I shall go with Walter alone."

Then he spoke in a low tone to her again.

"You must take even greater care of yourself now, my darling," he said.

Margery went to get her hat, as he had wished, and again humour came to her aid. It was funny, not distressing any more, but merely funny. She had done him a wrong; she had thought that his work was more engrossing to him than the news she had given him. But that was quite a mistake; he had been unable to attend properly owing to what he had heard, and was going to make holiday instead. And she shook with quiet laughter that no longer had any bitterness in it. It seemed to her that Walter with his simplicity and his sympathy had driven that away.

Arnold watched her retreating figure with affectionate eyes. Her instant anxiety lest it was some sort of physical malaise that had driven him at this unwonted hour from his work touched him. Evidently Margery had no idea how her news had moved him; she had apologized for her interruption, for instance, and it had not occurred to her that it was this that had stood all the morning between his page and him. He turned to Walter, feeling that he must share his delight with somebody.

"I must tell you, my dear Walter," he said, "what a joy is coming to us. Margery is going to have a child. I do not know when I have been more moved or affected. It is that which has made me leave my work early. I felt really unable to do justice either to my subject or myself."

Walter hesitated a moment, then decided not to tell Arnold that he already knew, and made some suitable reply of congratulation.

Arnold lit a cigarette, a thing again rather unusual with him, since he seldom smoked except directly after meals.

"And so I am making a holiday of it," he repeated. "Ah, by the way, you can tell me, perhaps, as you are straight back from Athens. Are they doing any excavation on the site of the Long walls? One wants, of course, to have the very latest results that are obtainable."

Arnold felt himself so much calmed and steadied again by tea-time that afterward (though he went into his room in the first instance only to set some papers in order, and write to the London library for a parcel of books which he knew he would want in the course of the next week), beginning by adding a few words only to complete a compilation of certain

authorities on the constitution of the Athenian dikasteries, he insensibly found himself warming to his work again, and devoting to it his best instead of his second-best attention. Indeed, it seemed to him in the few conscious moments that elapsed before his investigation gripped and absorbed him again that an unusual vividness and power of concentration had come to his brain. It might be that he worked habitually rather too long in the morning, and that this little rest to-day had revivified him, but another explanation that Margery's news had quickened and sharpened wits as well as emotion seemed to him the more probable, and also the more acceptable. He remembered that at the time of his father's death he had — seeking for work as a distraction to his real and genuine grief — done a piece of astonishingly acute analysis. . . . That seemed to be on all fours with the other, . . . and then the fascination of his work hypnotised him, rendered him unconscious of himself or the possible reason for his acuteness of observation.

Margery and he, as usual, dined alone, and, as usual, after dinner went to sit in his room, which was more comfortable for two or three people than the drawing-room with its formal furniture. The card-table with its Patience pack, was laid out ready for them for this, after Arnold had glanced through the evening paper, and perhaps given her the latest bulletin about his work, formed, as a rule, the pastime for the evening. There was a slight excitement about it, sufficient to keep the mind pleasantly occupied, while at the same time it made no unreasonable demands on a brain already sufficiently exercised. But to-night he did not as usual move from his chair by the fireplace to those placed

ready by the card-table, and Margery again wondered at the irregularity. Then it appeared that the great talk was coming.

"The 31st of August," he said — "a day always to be marked by a white stone. I have often wondered before now how I should feel if you came to me with that beautiful news, and I had never guessed or imagined how beautiful it would be. And for you, my darling, why, it must be even more wonderful for you than for me."

She left her seat, and perched herself on the arm of his low chair. It was difficult to know what to say to this, for the very truth of it made it unreal.

"Yes, dear. It is beyond telling," she said. "I can hardly talk about it even to you. Aren't you going to play your Patience to-night?"

Here he was completely at sea: he made no guess at all as to Margery's lack of responsiveness, and he himself was feeling so very expansive. But the memory of the dreadful flatness, and the acute disappointment of this morning, when she came to him with shining eyes and open heart, made it impossible for her to discuss or talk over the matter again. It was far better that he should say nothing about it than that he should (as he quite assuredly would) again fail so utterly to reach her feelings or divine what was in her heart. She had taken her heart to him in her hands, so to speak, open, beating, and he had not seen. And just now with all the tenderness of night, of still dark hours when she could be alone with her knowledge close round her, it did not seem possible to risk further inadequacy on his part. She might be amused if he continued to assure her how deeply he felt,

she might, which would be much worse, feel bitter again and estranged from him. She was sure she was wise in proposing Patience.

It was then, when the knowledge that ought to have brought them into such indissoluble unity was theirs, that misunderstanding really entered. He thought it strange and unaccountable that she had so little of response to his wonderful platitudes, whereas the truth was that she could not talk on the level of these, simply because to her it was mere empty gabble. But Arnold did not despair of showing her what prospective fatherhood was to him, since by doing that (in well-chosen words) he might kindle in her that maternal sense in which she seemed to be lacking. And, foolish though the attempt was, there was something rather pathetic about it.

"Ah, to-night I think Patience can wait!" he said. "I feel that I should not be able to take that interest in it which redeems it from futility. I feel that life, even life with you, my dearest, has been lifted on to a higher level to-day. The wonder, the miracle of love has been made more real to us both. Is it not strange — yet, after all, perhaps it is only natural — that when the great Lords and Princes of the heart come and dwell with one, how common, how ordinary the things which one thought were worthy of one's highest effort become? It was so with me, dear, when we married; I scarcely touched a book for six months. And it was so again with me this morning; you and your news came between the work and me, so that everything else seemed remote. I wonder you did not guess that when you saw me coming out so long before my ordinary time."

How she wished he would go and play Patience! It was just because she loved him that she could not bear these academic futilities and this really exquisite language. Already he was comparing the interest evoked in him by the prospect of his fatherhood with the interest he felt in the age of Pericles. If he only would not compare them at all! And the fact that the age of Pericles was for the time distinctly the less absorbing made the comedy of it more tragical.

And there was more to come.

"There was another result, too, dear," he said, "which I am sure will interest you, as you take such a deep and loving interest in my work. I went to my room after tea, though I had meant, and told you, to take a complete holiday, and almost before I knew it I was absorbed in my work, and found I was seeing through obscurities, observing the solution of apparent incongruities, in a way that surprised me. I cleared up two or three little points which I nearly despaired of reconciling last week. Such news as you gave me to-day, I think, must quicken all one's faculties. Certainly it is long since I felt my brain so active and percipient."

Margery gave a little sigh, half regretful, but wholly tender. It was still Arnold who spoke.

"I am very glad!" she said. "I hope that it will last, that you will work better now than ever before."

This last spurred him on to the development of the thoughts which he felt to be so concordant with hers, and which, word by word, became more antagonistic.

"I am sure it will be so," he said; "and how these weeks that are coming will be made gold of in the memory of each

of us. Before this year autumn has always been to me a time of retrospection, if not of sadness. One is wont to dwell on the glory of the summer that has passed, and to lament the yellowing and fallen leaves. But this year how different it will be for us both; the months that pass will bring fruition nearer; it is no wintry death that lies in front of us, but the springing of fresh life."

That might have been adequate this morning; now it was empty to Margery. But the hand of hers that stole round his neck was genuinely there: she loved him, and he was being himself anyhow. It was no pose that dictated those charming reflections and clothed them in simple beautiful words. But — and here was the difference — what he said now was the result of reflection. He had not been spontaneous. This morning, when he first knew, he had not *felt*. And then, as he went on, the clinging caress of her fingers was relaxed.

"And what gift am I to bring you, my darling?" he said, "in return for the gift you are bringing me? My love? You know that you have it. And there is nothing which is so distilled from me, me myself as that. But as a side-show, shall we say, there is something else I shall be bringing every day to advance toward its birth. You guess. I see you guess. And I can give you news of that. Only this evening I finished what we have called the sinews and muscles of the book. To-morrow, dear, I begin writing. There will be 'Chapter I.' written at the head of a piece of paper, and then the book will begin. I should never have believed it possible that within a couple of months of the time when I set up the skeleton, I should have been able to begin the

writing. But so it is. And do you know why it has been so rapid, and also, I trust, so sure? It is just you, Margery — you and your sympathy and your love. I have never worked in so wonderful an atmosphere before. And now I must make a little confession. Do you know I was almost glad when my beloved mother went away? I wanted undiluted you."

It seemed that he did not notice the relaxation of her hand. His own had grasped it, and the warmth and eagerness of his own feeling were sufficient stimulus to him. Besides, a hundred and a thousand times had Margery shown the eagerness of her sympathy with his work; it was scarcely strange that he should take it for granted now.

"You sit on the throne of my heart," he said, "and look down with smiles and blessing on my brain and its work. No, my dearest, I am not exaggerating what I feel." Margery had made a little gesture of shrinking, which he again quite misunderstood. "You are the crown of every part of me, brain and heart alike. There is nothing which I do not dedicate to you, for you inspire it all. If you told me to tear my work up, if you forbade me to go on with it, I think I should obey. Do you remember how Rossetti buried his book of poems in his wife's coffin? I could do that. But it is not coffins, it is cradles that concern us."

A thought, sudden as a flicked whip-lash, but luminous as a flash of lightning, started into Margery's brain.

"He is not talking about me," she said to herself; "he is talking about himself."

It came and went; stinging like the lash, illuminating as the lightning. There was no need for her to make calls

upon her heart to banish it, for it was gone almost before she knew it was there. But it had been there.

"I want you only, you alone," he added. "And I want you to want me only."

Margery's mind suddenly became stiff and still, like a pointer at scent. She could not help wondering if something specific was in his mind. And the wonder, from being remote possibility, got suddenly nearer and more firmly outlined.

"Do you mean Walter?" she asked.

He smiled at her.

"I will answer you by another question," he said. "Do you not think we are all in all to each other?"

Margery's face grew suddenly troubled. She detached her hand from his, and got up from the chair-arm where she had been sitting.

"But that is no reason why we should not have friends," she said. "And I thought you liked to see him."

Again the love of which he was capable burst into flame, a trim, well-ordered flame.

"If you really asked me — really, I mean," he said, "to go with you to a desert island, I would go."

Margery bent forward toward him, and spoke out that which she was conscious of.

"Yes, yes, dear," she said, "I believe you would. But you would like your book with you."

For a moment he did not reply.

"I have already told you that I would tear up my book if you wished," he said. "I would drown it like Prospero."

An unhappy classical allusion! Anything would have

been better than that! Margery had to make a very conscious effort with herself now.

"Yes, dear, I believe it," she said. "But should I not be a dreadfully stupid goose if I said, 'Come with me to a desert island, and don't bring anything that interests you, otherwise I shall feel that I am not all in all to you'? I think it would be very silly of me. And I do not think it is wise of you, Arnold, to want me to see less of my friends. I have not many of them, and, oh, how willingly I have been rather lonely sometimes, simply because I wasn't lonely really, with you always here. And I can't treat my friends like that; it is as unreasonable of you to suggest it as it would be of me to suggest that you should cease to do your work. Does it lessen our love for each other that we should both of us want companions? Your work is a companion to you. And, after all, for the sake of that, Walter is the only companion I have had all these weeks. Oh, surely you know me well enough not to misunderstand me, to feel how delicious they have been to me! And I just love to have you tell me that you were not sorry when even that darling mother went away."

And then a genius more evil than classical allusions prompted him.

"Is Walter, then, more to you than my mother is to me?" he said.

Margery stared at him for a moment. Then she gave a long sigh, wholly pitiful.

"Oh, you poor darling," she said.

Then, since he still sat there, not coming to her, she came to him, and again sat on the arm of his chair.

"It is nothing," she said. "It wasn't you who said that. What dreadful nonsense it was, too! We both know that. Women are always allowed the last word, dear, and that is mine."

He sat quite silent for a moment. Then he drew her head down to his.

"That is generous of you, Margery," he said.

And that was a true word.

CHAPTER XII

STORMS in the physical world of rain and thunder-cloud may always have one of two effects, which are opposite to one another, though each is a natural consequence. The pouring out and explosions of the elements may, as we call it, clear the air, and induce a period of calm and sunny weather; or they may unsettle the weather and be but the precursor of fitful and uncertain days. The analogy seems to apply, if not too closely pressed, to the economy of psychical, no less than physical, forces: a disturbance in these regions sometimes produces equilibrium again, sometimes it is but a token of disturbed equilibrium, and has not the effect of restoring it. The interview last recorded between Margery and her husband is perhaps of too slight an order to be dignified by the title of storm, and, since it ended in absolute amity again, it might be supposed that, slight though the explosion was, a mere winking of summer lightning, it would be succeeded by a period of halcyon days. True, at the end of it Arnold had made an innuendo of a rather evil sort, but the fulness of Margery's forgiveness for that, and, indeed, the fact that it had no real foundation in his mind should have made of it an element of reconciliation.

But not once nor twice, but so often that the thought seemed to take place as a permanent background in her mind, Margery wondered, as the days of a very still September passed, whether the disturbance had entirely passed. Some-

times it seemed to her that the hours contained a quality of perfection more radiant than any she had known, but at others it seemed that the whole sky was gossamered by webs of cloud, so that the light was pale. Often with self-inflicted reproach she would ask herself what it was she missed, and she found that her answer was symbolized just by that turning of the leaf of a book that she had heard when she waited for Arnold to come close — close to her. And then honestly, with no half-hearted blows, she would belabour herself for her puniness. But, most disconcertingly, she found that she was belabouring not what she called her puniness only, but her sense of motherhood. And she could not quite beat that into submission.

Puny she might call herself, but in truth during those September days she was not small of soul, and all unconsciously that great sweet flower was expanding daily, putting out every hour new and fragrant petals that had their birth in her gentle, fiery heart. Even at the first moment of his saying that little bitter thing, in comparing his affection for his mother with hers for Walter, she had nothing but pure pity for that, and her pity, which was momentary flaring and expiring, had but left in the air the fragrance of the love with which it was impregnated.

In other respects, in all of them, everything went on as with the quiet and uneventfulness of perfect prosperity. Mrs. Leveson had been back once again for a week, meaning originally to stop for a fortnight, but with extraordinarily genial humour she had found at the end of a week that she had a pressing engagement elsewhere which she had quite unaccountably — she with her excellent memory — for-

gotten about. Margery had not failed to smell so prodigious a rat, and taxed her with the truth. She confessed the solidity of Margery's conjecture at once.

"Yes, my dear," she said, "you are absolutely right. But though we all feel *de trop* at times, and have to put up with it, though it is as uncomfortable as a cold in the head, there are limits. I did not know any one could be so *de trop* as I, and nothing has given me so much pleasure for a long time. But I can't stand it any longer; it is ridiculous for any self-respecting mother to be so dreadfully in the way. Arnold loves me, I know, but just now he will love me best at a distance."

It was all quite, quite true, but Mrs. Leveson, so far from feeling the least piqued at her superfluousness, was genuinely delighted with it. Then for a moment she became more serious.

"Margery, dear, you are a wonderful girl, do you know? I am of a jealous and exacting disposition, I am really, and you stepped in, you Tanagra figurine, as he used to call you, and broke up unconsciously and completely and permanently a very strong mother-and-son attachment. He doesn't love me in the least less than he did, but there he was, sitting in a room, so to speak, with me, the farthing dip, and you turned on the electric light. The farthing dip goes on burning just the same, but it is not the sole supply of illumination."

"Oh, do you think you are right about it all?" asked Margery with extreme feebleness, and flushing a little with pleasure.

"My dear, I don't think anything about it. I pack my

trunks. Now, I have been quite frank with you, and so I have the right to ask you the most inconvenient question. Don't you know I'm right perfectly well? Hasn't" — Mrs. Leveson's eyes twinkled with great enjoyment — "hasn't Arnold really gone so far as to tell you he doesn't want me?"

Margery raised a comically-imploring face to her mother-in-law's. But the good humour and content she found there made her laugh.

"It's no use," she said. "He did say he was almost, he said almost, glad when you went away before."

"He will be quite glad this time," said Mrs. Leveson with cheerful decision.

"I like that Walter of yours," she went on, "and Arnold likes him. I am sorry he is going away. It is excellent for you both to have him over here constantly. By the way, I met his mother to-day when I was out walking, and she held out hopes of coming over to see you to-morrow. I think you had better be prepared for a scolding, or rather for — for the somewhat voluminous assurance that she is not going to scold you.

"What have I done?" asked Margery.

"Nothing which you could avoid. But really, my dear, your Aunt Aggie is a very curious woman."

"I know. And she doesn't like me," said Margery. "It is such a pity. You see the poor darling had — had all sorts of other schemes for other people, and — and they didn't come off, and she thinks it was me."

"So it was," said Mrs. Leveson smartly.

"I know, but not in her sense. It wasn't my fault."

Margery laughed, again without any sort of resentment, but with the simplest amusement.

"And she was so funny when I told her I was going to have a child," she said. "She really behaved as if it was a personal insult to her. And you know Arnold can't quite stand her. Will she come to tea, do you think? I shall warn him, and then he will go straight to his study when he comes in, and I shall say he went out riding after lunch, and I haven't seen him since."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Leveson. "Make him come and take his share."

"But it will put him out of mood for his work," said the girl.

Mrs. Leveson put a hand on each side of her face and kissed her.

"No wonder Arnold finds me *de trop*," she said. "But except as regards him, I don't believe you do."

That was all good; good too was the daily report of the progress of Arnold's work, for he said it "was writing itself," the phrase expressing to him the most perfect, because it was the most effortless, species of literary production. He was soaked in the knowledge of his theme, and whether or not it was on account of the reason he had given to Margery, namely, that the stir of his emotions had quickened his literary faculty, the beautiful sentences flowed in continuous stream past the observant challenging-house of his fastidious taste. Now and then, it is true, a check would come, and for a whole morning he would scarcely set down a page of writing, and he would search through the pavement, so to speak, of felicitous phrases which he had collected for an

hour at a time in the hopes of finding something which would suggest to him anyhow the turn of speech of which he was in need. Nothing but the exact and proper words would satisfy him — even when he was but enumerating facts or setting the mere events of a year in order on his pages, the words had to be beautiful, so that, when spoken, they were music in themselves; not only had the facts to be unerring, but the manner of their presentation likewise. And Margery, watching with the clear-eyed sympathy of love, began to realize what this clean-cut creation meant to the creator, what passion prompted the patience with which he would search for the "inevitable word," with what gleeful confidence he would know when he had got it. Then every week, or, if production had been more than usually rapid, perhaps twice a week, he would read to her what he had written. One such evening a rather dreadful incident occurred.

She had been out most of the day, in bugling gales of the equinox, and coming in about tea-time had felt that delicious heaviness of the eyelids and lassitude of limb that result from much buffeting with winds, and as Arnold was going to read to her that evening she thought it well to go upstairs with the intention of having a nap before dinner. But a story which she was reading, and took up now, since the remarkable dulness of it would, she thought, conduce to sleep, suddenly became overwhelmingly interesting, and she read on wide-eyed and tense of mind until her maid told her that the dressing-bell was already an affair of a quarter of an hour ago. And, after dinner, Arnold read to her about the constitution of the famous dikasteries.

Poor Margery strove in vain. It was all no use, and

after passing through all the nightmare torture of trying to keep awake, after persuading herself that she could attend better with her eyes shut, and having to open them again as if the lids were dumb-bells of the most Herculean size, after hearing Arnold's voice continue reading, but reading, as it seemed to her, gibberish, after suddenly becoming aware that Aunt Aggie was angry with her for eloping with Walter, these disquieting experiences passed, and she slept dreamlessly. And when she awoke Arnold had left his chair and was playing Patience all by himself. But, after all, he was, outwardly at least, very kind about it; he only bargained with her that when she felt sleepy she should say so, and did not propose to discontinue his readings altogether. But, alas! he put the fact down in that dreadful little account-book of the mind which he had begun keeping in London. But of that Margery knew nothing, nor indeed did he know how many items were indelibly written there. He did not glance back at them, or wish to recollect them.

So the work (with the exception of this little incident) and all that pertained to the work were satisfactory, and Margery could no longer even want to weigh its importance to her husband against what she had hoped something else might weigh. She was quite content to know that to him this intellectual interest was something paramount, and saw that the work could not have been so exquisite (though once she had slept over it) had not it been of supreme importance to him. It was worth while doing it because it was so beautiful, but it could not have been so beautiful had he not given himself to it body and mind, so that everything in the daily arrangement of the house was attracted to and

moved in its orbit. And, luckily for her peace of mind, she did not at present suspect that the seeds of sex-antagonism lurked there, barren and unfructified as yet, but full of potential life.

And how delightfully satisfactory was Walter and all that concerned him except the one dreadful fact that every day brought the hour of his departure to Athens nearer. To Margery who, when she first knew that he loved her, thought the old childish days when they played together were dead, it seemed now that they had risen from their graves unchanged and uncorrupted, so complete was his effacement of that which had stricken them. Her affection for him had never, from the very first, when he welcomed her forlorn little figure to the house in Curzon Street, altered in quality, and he had made it appear all these last two months that the disturbing element had gone from him. Never once by word or look did he give himself and the real state of his affection away. He could not be all to her, and to be her comrade again was so infinitely better than to lose her intercourse altogether, which must have happened if he let appear for a moment his longing and desire for her. For about true love there is a sacredness which the denial of it by those of lower grade does not impair. She was holy to him; therefore he met her faithfully in common ways.

Arnold, after the mistake he had made over the frequency of Walter's visits, had been sedulous to repair his error as far as the frequency of his visits was concerned, and it was he who generally reminded Walter that he was at all times welcome. But Arnold could not postpone (nor in his heart

did he in the least wish to, though his tongue framed regrets) the end of his leave, and this morning, the last of a sunny September, Margery was walking up and down the gravel path by the long flower-bed, waiting for his arrival in the cool sunshine after a night of frost, as in the August days she had waited in the shade of the towers of elms. The frost, the first of the year, had not been of sufficient severity to blacken the flowers, and they would flame for another day yet; the scarlet of the salvias was undimmed, phloxes had lost none of their delicate youthful colouring, the sunflowers turned untarnished gold to their God, and the dahlias with their great fat heads — they always reminded Margery of barmaids; buxom was exactly the epithet for them — were still complacent and comfortable. But the great elms had already begun to yellow, and the hint of russet that should flame into the golds and reds of October was beginning to deepen in the beechwoods. The lawn was covered with the diamonds of the melted frost, and a few withered leaves had drifted against the wires of croquet hoops. That insignificant little item was somehow wonderfully significant to Margery; it reminded her so much of the days after Walter had gone to school in succeeding Septembers, when the croquet hoops still remained upon the lawn at Ballards, but nobody cared to play.

By to-morrow Walter would again have gone; his departure was autumnal, too. But inside the house there was Arnold in the height of his intellectual summer. As he had said, not many days ago, autumn this year was for him no precursor of winter, and Margery, who at this moment felt rather keenly the approach of the chillier days and their

diminished lights, warmed herself, so to speak, at that steady fire.

Then round the corner came the familiar step, and Walter was with her.

"I can't stop to lunch to-day, Margery," he said. "My mother makes rather a point of my getting back, as it's my last day. Indeed, she thought it was rather unnecessary my coming over at all. But I had to say good-bye to you and Arnold. What's to be done, though? He won't be out before I have to go. Shall I go in and interrupt him? I want to get something definite out of him as to whether he will bring you out to Athens this autumn or not."

Margery shook her head.

"You won't get anything definite out of him," she said. "At least, I can't. I tried last night. There's nothing definite to get. It must depend on the book, he says. He may find he wants to see certain things himself; if so, we shall come. But if he doesn't — why, we shan't. And he can't tell in advance. I quite see that."

"It seems to me that everybody and everything has to stand round the book, like — like a row of flunkies," said Walter, with some asperity.

"Yes, dear, one can look at it in that way if one likes," said she, "but the other way to look at it is that it's such a joy to be able to help."

"'Fraid I'm not quite so keen. I want you to come out to Athens, and I shouldn't care the least if the progress of the book was delayed for a month. Besides, all arrangements of every kind can't be postponed indefinitely for its sake."

Now the book was part of Arnold, and Margery was at

present utterly loyal to it, for the seeds of antagonism were as yet dormant.

"But that is exactly what they must do," she said. "The book has got to be made as good as it can be made; it's got to be perfect. Oh, Walter, you don't know how I love being able to help. I do help, you know. I'm just what he wants. He told me so!"

"But are you going to stop on here all autumn and winter without stirring?" he asked.

"Unless he wants a change," said Margery simply.

"And without having anybody here?"

"Unless he wants people," she said.

For a moment her mind went back to that morning of dreadful disappointment when she told him her secret. But she put that away; she had been either thinking too much about herself then or she had formed a wrong idea of him. In either case, she had better banish what she had felt then. Yet it required an effort to stow it quite away.

"It's part of Arnold, you see, Walter," she said. "It's his mind, which is a very beautiful thing, which is concerned. Supposing he was ill, for instance, wouldn't one gladly go on a voyage with him, or live anywhere the doctors recommended, so that his body might get strong and vigorous? So here — it's the well-being of his mind that is concerned. One must give it the best conditions possible, at any cost. Not that it is any cost — it's a joy to be able to."

"Well, since you feel like that ——" he began.

"And since you perfectly understand that I do, and why and how I do," interrupted Margery, "we'd better say that we agree instead of pretending to argue!"

"But I want you to come to Athens," said he.

"Ah, good gracious, don't I also want to come?" she said.

Strolling and talking, they had passed for the last minute or two just opposite Arnold's windows. The sound of their steps had originally caught his attention as he tried to frame a couple of sentences which should sum up the curious secluded position of the married Athenian woman. It was not the harem idea exactly; the wife was of greater nonentity (yet greater nonentity would not do, for there are no degrees in nothingness) than the favourite wife in the harem would be. She was a slave to her husband's wishes, and she had no part in his life, except to give him heirs: she had no influence on him, no share in his intellectual pursuits. Probably she was kindly treated; if not, she had an easy redress in divorce, but she was a prisoner almost in his house, except on the feast of the Thesmophoria, from which all men were excluded, and the women had a "real day out." Their position was poles apart from the position of women in England, and yet how seldom even they really shared or helped in their husbands' intellectual affairs, except to arrange that the material machinery of the house should so move silently and not distract him. All this, all that was suggested by this, had to be put in a couple of summing-up sentences.

The steps a little disturbed him; then as they came nearer he heard the familiar voices. Then the steps passed in front of his window, while the voices continued. He could not hear the words, though by listening he might have done so. But his object was not to listen, but to distract

himself altogether from the disturbing sounds. But it was no use; his mind drifted steadily away from his work — the thread was broken. Such a thing had not happened for weeks, and it was annoying. No doubt Margery and Walter had not meant to interrupt him, but it was little thoughtless of Margery to come and chatter just in front of his window.

He leaned back in his chair and looked out. They were standing just outside on the gravel walk, she with her arm in his. And now that the thread of his attention to his work was completely severed he could hear the words.

"Ah, good gracious, don't I also want to come?" said Margery.

The possibility of Athens for a few weeks or so during the autumn had been so often discussed that he guessed it was of that they were speaking. And now he listened.

"Well, come out with Olive then," said Walter. "She is really thinking of coming, if she can get any one to go with her."

"And leave Arnold here," she said. "Likely, isn't it?"

They moved on, and Arnold, now that the interruption was over, took up his pen again, and bent his mind to those elusive sentences which were to sum up the position of the wives of the Greeks of Pericles's time. Certainly if they did not help their husbands in their intellectual pursuits he felt pretty sure that they were not allowed to hinder and interrupt them, and it was most annoying just at the close of a section to be disturbed like this. Of course dear Margery had not meant it, but she did not seem to know how easily disturbed is the balance of a mind delicately thread-

ing its way along the razor-edge of literary composition, and how hard to regain is that subtle equipoise. Perhaps if he read his last two or three paragraphs through again very carefully he might distil from them their essence and find the sentences he was hunting for. But if he could not find the precise words of summary, not even the annoyance of a barren morning should make him be content with the second-best.

Slowly and carefully he read over the last half-dozen pages of minute, scholarly handwriting, and then for a few minutes let them simmer in his brain. Then, like steam rising from the ebullience of clear, lucid water, he felt the conclusion, distilled from what he had written, wreathing upward, and he began to write. And even as the first sentence began to form itself on the paper he heard voices outside again, and Margery called to him.

"Arnold, dear," she said, "Walter cannot stop to lunch, and I know you wouldn't like him to go away without saying good-bye, so I risked disturbing you."

For one moment Arnold tried to concentrate his mind on what was so nearly done. But it slipped from him, sliding back, so to speak, from the very point of his stylograph into the reservoir of ink again. It had gone. He threw down his pen, and, with more impatience than he often showed, rose from his seat.

"I shall be delighted to wish Walter good-bye," he said to himself.

"Shall he come in?" asked Margery.

"No, my dear, I will come out," he said sharply.

It was no use attempting to get to work again after this,

and, when Walter had gone, he so far departed from his usual habits as to send for the morning paper (which it was his invariable custom to glance at after lunch), and sat in the sun to read it. Here Margery found him (with a certain sinking of the heart) when she came back from seeing Walter off.

"I am sorry he has gone," she said. "Shall we go for our stroll, dear?"

"It wants twenty minutes to one," said he. "Is there any reason why we should go earlier to-day?"

She sat down by him, looking at the page nearest her. He instantly turned over.

"Arnold, I didn't do wrong in interrupting you, did I?" she asked, knowing there was something wrong.

"By no means," he said. "My morning had already been interrupted by your conversation just outside my window. I should not have alluded to it unless you had asked."

"Oh, dear, I *am* sorry," said she. "It was dreadfully careless of me. Hasn't the work gone well to-day?"

"It has not gone at all," said he.

Then, suddenly, in the midst of these distractions, an inspiration came into his brain. It was not the same conclusion as he had meant to write, but the new idea would sum up the paragraphs more trenchantly than anything he had yet thought of. He rose at once.

"But it is not of the slightest consequence, my dearest," he said, his good humour being completely restored by this unexpected find, "for just this moment the thought I had been hunting for so long came to me. Let us go for our stroll as usual at one."

He went straight back to his study, and the words flowed from his pen.

"To our modern notions," he wrote, "this idea of the entire subordination of women to men appears almost barbaric, accustomed as we are to think of them as the inspirers of men's work. It was not thus that the flower of Greek civilization blossomed; from the cold, hard rock of intellectual strength it sprang — fragrant, gem-like, human. Nor, perhaps, till some race yet to be born recognizes that unemotional scrutiny is necessary for emotional analysis and the production of virile work, shall again appear in the fields of human efforts so austere and marvelous a flower."

He paused: the sentence was but in the rough and would want careful rewriting, but the point of his summing-up was contained there. He wondered what criticism Margery would make when he read it to her.

There was not yet enough written since the last reading to form an after-dinner occupation for several nights to come, and before he left this section altogether he found that his unexpected summing-up required the insertion of a few scattered sentences in the previous paragraphs. After that the relations between Pericles and his wife, followed by their amicable divorce, was easy to write, and it was only a few days later that he announced he had sufficient manuscript in hand to make an evening's reading. He told her this at dinner, mentioning also the subject on which he had been engaged.

Poor Margery sneezed violently before she answered. Contrary to his advice, she had, with the threatening of a

cold already on her, been out for several hours that afternoon in a keen wind which blew up squalls of chilly rain from the northeast, and it was clear that the cold threatened no longer, but had arrived.

"Oh, but that will be interesting," she said, disregarding a rather savage stab of pain that shot through her head on the explosion of those convulsive sneezes. "I want to know exactly what the Greek women were like, not the shepherdesses, I mean, but people like Pericles's wife."

She declined the wing of a chicken that was handed her at this moment, and, as she had already refused *entrée*, Arnold noticed it, for her appetite was usually of the most encouraging order.

"Nothing wrong, dear?" he asked.

"I *think* I've caught cold," said Margery, feeling she was not overstating the case. "It's so stupid to eat when one can't taste properly. Is that greedy? I expect so. But I shall love to be read to. It will be tremendously interesting. Oh, Arnold, do you remember that dreadful evening when I went to sleep? It wasn't that I wasn't interested, but I was so sleepy. To-night shall we begin directly after dinner? I shall go to bed early."

Now Arnold was very sorry that Margery had caught cold, and sincerely hoped that a long night would mend matters. At the same time he knew that colds were infectious, also that there was a good deal of influenza about, and it was quite ridiculous for him to run unnecessary risks and perhaps sacrifice a week of work.

"You will be wise to do that," he said. "And lest I should disturb you coming to bed, I will sleep in my dressing-room.

Margery laughed.

"Oh, I should have thought of that in a minute!" she said.

After dinner, accordingly, he began his reading at once, and Margery found it engrossingly but rather uncomfortably interesting. She had sat herself down as usual on the floor by the side of the chair where he read, and it was not primarily the fear of infecting him with her cold that made her move. It was when he came to that summing up, which he had rewritten, making it more lucid than ever, that she shifted her place. For what he said there was said, not historically of the Greeks of the age of Pericles, but of man and woman. Out of his own mouth he attributed the unapproachable supremacy of Greek art and achievement to the fact that it was the intellect of man, unclouded by emotional mists, that was allowed free play, without being hindered and dulled by the meddlings of womankind. Wives in those days did all that wives could do, by giving sons to their husbands. Otherwise they were nothing to them, and in consequence there was this birth of the wondrous flower — what was it — "gem-like, fragrant, human." It was all quite clear.

At the end of the paragraph he paused, and slid a small table nearer to him, to get a cigarette. It was then that Margery rose and sat in a chair on the other side of the fireplace, where a fire of blue-flamed logs burned cheerfully — she did not speak, and he lit his cigarette in silence. Then, as was quite usual, he said:

"Well? How does it seem to you to go?"

"Is that the end of the section?" she asked.

"Yes; I go into the particular instance of Pericles and his wife after that."

She leaned forward in the more distant chair that she had taken.

"Oh, Arnold, it is beautifully written!" she said. "I don't think you ever said anything more lucidly. But — but is that your opinion?"

"It is a point of view," he said, rather regretting the lucidity of it, regretting, anyhow, that he had read it to her.

"But," — and again Margery stammered as she had done when he came to see her in the shabby room that was her own at Ballards — "but, is it w-what you r-really think? It s-seems to me to m-matter. It is not only about the ancient Greeks. It's about us all. D-do you really think that the best work done by men is done when they are not b-bothered by women, and are able to take an unemotional scrutiny — wasn't that the phrase? Can't we help at all? I hoped that we helped."

It was sex to sex now. He had meant, and knew it, that the best intellectual work was done by solitary intellects, by the mind unencumbered with emotions. It was difficult to explain, indeed it was so difficult that he, like Dr. Johnson, should have accepted the fact that it was better if it had been impossible.

"No, I don't mean that at all," he said; "and, no doubt, dearest, I must have expressed it very badly, if you think that was the point. It is only that every thinking process, in order to be valuable, must be allowed to proceed without interruption. You, you delicious women, are so much more attractive than anything else, that instead of thinking and

creating, we leave our duties and come out into the sunlight, and search for a smile instead of a simile."

"Ah, we hinder, and do not help, then?" said Margery quickly.

Something, it might be called manliness (though he had not very much of that) or pride, or mere desire to justify what he had certainly written, prevented his capitulation. What easy terms Margery would have made! Indeed, there would not have been any terms at all; his capitulation would have meant her surrender. She had no design of marching into his citadel, she but longed for him to march into hers. But these dreadful sentences implied that she had none; there was nothing that he could take there, which was not his already, while she but prevented him from enjoying and making the most of his own.

"But you misunderstand," he said, knowing that she quite understood the particular mood under which he had written that which he had just read to her. "I say you enchant and bewilder us, and if you take our minds off that which we call work, you give us that which we know of life."

But his voice, his presence, no longer quite satisfied Margery.

"Oh, Arnold, is that really what you meant?" she asked.

The sex-antagonism had sprouted; the seeds of it had strong, erect little stalks growing from them. She knew quite well what he meant, and knew he knew it. He, at the moment of writing those biting sentences, definitely placed himself and his work as the things which had to be ministered unto, and she, with the unborn child, had to minister. Oh, she would serve, for she had served, and sucked honey of joy

from her service, but he did not even recognize there was service given him, any more than he recognized that the sun rose in the morning. There was daylight again, and he could see to explore his notebooks, and write his perfect sentences. She had to be as reasonable and as subservient as the sun. It rose for him; she was always ready to stroll with him.

Thus sweetly, naturally, she surrendered again.

"My cold is quite too awful!" she said; "and it makes me stupid. I think all you have read to me is brilliant; you have never written anything better. But may I have it all again when I am less stupefied? I long to hear the rest of it, but to-night, dear, I am quite too idiotic."

Margery went upstairs to bed, her head aching savagely, and her heart aching a little, too. She wanted so much to understand just what he did feel about this and every other point which concerned him or her. And to-night she felt more: she felt as if she almost wanted to get leave to love him, to be assured that it did not confuse and impede the exact workings of his exquisite mind. There was nothing of sarcasm, no conscious irony, about the thought; but that brilliant, lucid summing up was strangely disquieting, for it seemed to be the key to the disappointment and chill she had felt when she first told him that she was with child. Then he had so soon turned over a leaf of some wise book; now he seemed to her to explain, definitely and in his own inimitable style, why he did that. There was a big part of him, his mind, that with which she as a girl had fallen in love, into which (such at least was his account of the matter) she as woman could not penetrate; and her presence there but

confused and dulled its orderly working. All she could do was to see that no interruption, no chance whisper or unpunctual meal, disturbed him when, so to speak, he sat in his own mind. She might guard the threshold, keeping outside, and from time to time below the locked door he would pass out the manuscript that he had written for her to read.

But from him she had no such locked chambers. All the warm, sweet-smelling rooms in her house of life were open for him, all were decorated in his honour should he in passing care to enter them. But it seemed sometimes that he scarcely cared to come into the one which was, above all, their own; he looked in, so to speak, saw, as a householder may see, that it was ready for him, and then — then there came the whisper of the turned leaf. He had already hurried back, so quickly, to the chamber of his own mind.

These disturbing thoughts flickered up and down in Margery's brain, even as, on the walls of her bedroom, the firelight leaped up and sank again, with flapping of flames. In that fitful illumination everything seemed distorted and out of scale; at one moment her own hand became to her monstrously large and close to her eyes, at another it would seem to recede till it became as remote as the vision of near things looked at through a reversed telescope.

Or again, the thing standing in her window, with white cloth and gleaming silver, was at one moment her dressing-table, and at the next a city, very far off, with twinkling lights and covering of snow. Then with a sense of tremendous relief she bound together and found common causes for these phenomena, the monstrous thoughts and the

unreal, uncertain scale of material and familiar objects. Her own headache and shivering gave her a clue, and she told herself, as was quite true, that she had a touch of fever, and that her brain, in abstract affairs, even as through the medium of her eyes, was playing her tricks. And she gave a little sigh of reassurement.

"Oh, that's all right, then!" she said to herself; and closing her eyes to shut out the giddiness of these varying sizes of things, she shut the mental eye also, and forbore to note more of the impressions which were, in all probability, equally unreal.

Poor Margery's explanation to herself of these divergencies from stability of size in material objects that night was completely justified next day when a few questions by the doctor and the evidence of a clinical thermometer convicted her of influenza. And that, though she was sufficiently uncomfortable and depressed, continued to be a relief, for sensibly, and with probability to back her, she was content for the present, without further examination, to put down her physical discomfort of the night before to physical causes. So her wise, anxious, little aching head was at once busy about Arnold again, devising for his comfort, anxious for him not to come near her for fear of infection, and wondering how to get some sort of companionship for him. Perhaps his mother would come for a week, perhaps ——

There came a knock at the door, and his voice asking if he might come in, and Margery sat up in bed.

"Yes, dear, but don't come close to me," she said. "Perhaps it would be even safer if you didn't come into the room at all. Poor dear, I hope you won't feel very lonely. I was

wondering if mother would come for a bit and keep you company."

Arnold had remained obediently remote from her bed. The window was open, but the air outside very still, and a draught coming from the opened door brought to her the vague pungency of eucalyptus.

"Ah, you dear, sensible boy," she said, "have heaps of eucalyptus about, and aren't oranges supposed to keep off infection? Isn't it silly of me? I am so vexed at myself. But about your mother?"

"Oh, I shall do very well," said he. "It's you who matters, dear. I hope you don't feel very uncomfortable. Head ache?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said she. "I shall be well in no time. Now, dear, don't stop here, and please, please, don't come again. It's no use two people being ill instead of one. But you might send me a little note now and then to say how the work gets on. And send a telegram to mother, won't you? I'm not a bit bad. Good-bye, dear."

"Am I altogether banished?" he said.

"Yes, altogether."

Margery lay down again, and shut the lids over her burning eyeballs. How sensible and quiet men were! She knew she would not have been half so sensible if it had been Arnold who was here instead of herself.

CHAPTER XIII

THANKS to the careful antiseptic precautions with which Arnold was so right to surround himself, thanks also to his implicit obedience to Margery's command that he should not come near her, no symptom of having caught the influenza from her manifested itself, and he spent a very solitary but most industrious week while she was still confined to her room by an attack that, without being serious, was undoubtedly sharp. Two or three times every day he sent her a little note about his thoughts and movements, for he knew that news of him was the reason for her desire to hear, and as many times a day, or even oftener, her maid, who was installed for the time as nurse, informed his man, who in turn repeated the bulletin to his master, the state of the patient. He was not anxious about her at any period during those days, for the doctor (whom he completely trusted) told him that there was no need for anxiety. Instead, therefore, of profitless expenditure of nervous force in being fearful, he devoted himself even more assiduously than ever to his work, and, striking the happiest vein of literary composition, found that the days passed in single pulsations of intellectual activity. Never before had he known so bright a noonday of felicitous production, and sheet by sheet of manuscript, exquisitely neat and with scarce an erasure, was added to the pile that was to be read to Margery when she was about again. But, though fol-

lowing her advice with regard to withdrawing himself completely from infectious possibilities, and making round him a halo of antiseptic influences, he did not adopt her counsel in asking his mother to keep him company, for he found that he was getting on so admirably in complete solitude. And on the eighth day of Margery's indisposition, when for the first time she was to come downstairs again, he counted up the pages that he had written in her absence, and found that they amounted to what, at the ordinary rate of production, would represent at least a fortnight's instead of a week's work. He was amazed at this himself, and it was the parent of reflections.

The doctor, who made his final visit that day and sanctioned her coming downstairs, gave Arnold his report before leaving. This had occurred at about eleven, after he had got to work, and, since Margery was getting up now and would be down before long, it followed that Arnold had to expect a rather broken morning, since he had quite determined to leave his work again to give her welcome to the ground floor. But it must not be supposed that he was conscious of any sense of ill-usage that he faced this morning of "running in and out," which had to take the place of the long-uninterrupted hours to which he had been accustomed. It was delightful that Margery was better, and though he felt it would have been more convenient if the doctor had called, as he usually did, in the afternoon, and that Margery was to come down after lunch instead of before, there would be no shadow of reserve over his welcome of her. Indeed, after her appearance, it was only likely that he would sit and talk to her, reading the paper or following her whim, till it was

time for him to take his stroll. To-morrow, perhaps, she would join him in that again.

He had got so accustomed to complete silence in the hall on to which his study opened that to-day the least noise there attracted his attention, and he went out to find Margery, looking rather white and uncertain of step, at the foot of the stairs. She made a little gesture of dismay when he appeared.

"Oh, I thought I was coming down so quietly," she said, "and would burst in upon you at one. I never intended to disturb you before, Arnold."

He felt charmed by her thoughtfulness, though he playfully scolded her for it.

"Then it was very unkind of you, my dear," he said. "As if I should wish to be left undisturbed when you make your triumphal descent again. Welcome down again, dear. Now, where will you sit? In your room, or in my study? It is sunnier there."

"But are you sure I shan't disturb you?" she asked.

"I wish to be disturbed by you. And what shall we do — read or talk?"

The words were sufficiently welcoming, but — but there were no harmonics, so to speak, awakened by them. Margery's instinct detected the lack of spontaneity, the presence of a plan; he was proposing, she felt sure, not what he wanted, but what he thought was expected of him. There was no sense in his losing more of his morning's work for the sake of doing what was suitable merely. Then, almost without pause, he spoke again.

"Remember, I haven't seen you for a week," he said.

She was right, and knew it. Otherwise that must have

been his heart's first cry, uttered without thought, not coming afterward, like this, to account for his willing sacrifice of his morning. Her own heart missed a spontaneity in his, just as it had missed, all this week, his disobedience to her command not to come and see her. She would so have liked him to be obstinate and foolish and headstrong. Yet, quite sincerely, while she refused to interrupt him, she commended his obedience.

"I know you've been a very good and obedient boy," she said, "and I reward you by disobedience, don't I, since I quite refuse to come and sit with you? But I shall come at one, may I, Arnold, and send you out for a walk?"

"You are dreadfully wilful," he said. "But you shall have your way. Yes, dear, do come and tell me when it is one. It is good to see you down again!"

Margery's sharp attack had wrought its usual havoc, and for the next week she was the victim of severe and heroically concealed depression. And her very success at concealing it from Arnold but added to it in some malign fashion. She was delighted at her success, but secretly and with upbraidings of self longed for him to see how miserable she felt. Though doing her very best to appear in the zenith of content, she could scarcely believe that her histrionic forces were such as to make him believe she was there. And all the time he gave her that intercourse which she most desired, the news of his successful work. Perhaps he saw her depression, and most sensibly and lovingly tried to take her mind off herself by diverting it into a channel that was so well-beloved. But when the worst moments came, she told herself (instantly though somewhat faintly contradicting

her own information) that he talked of his book because he thought of his book.

She had written to Walter during the period of her seclusion upstairs, and had written in the most optimistic of veins, giving him the news, it is true, of her influenza, but treating it as a thing that was not of the smallest consequence. She had but stated the fact of it, that Arnold's book was going on in the most swimming fashion, and said that he was most obedient to her mandate of not coming to see her, and that she had not set eyes on him for five days. And on this morning a reply came; there had been but eight days between the posting of her letter and the reception of his reply; he must have answered at once. "I wish I had been at home," he wrote, "and I bet I would have cheered you up a little. But I dare say influenza is awfully infectious, and probably I should have caught it, so that when you got a little better you would have had to come over to Ballards to cheer me up. I am glad Arnold is getting on so well with his work; isn't it nearly finished now? Do persuade him to bring you out here — make your doctor say you want change of air. Even if he hasn't finished his book it will all help him. He can have a sitting-room to himself, and grub away for all he is worth. But your letter sounds rather depressed. I don't know why I think so, but it does. And if he can't come, there's Olive, who wants to. Just telegraph, and we'll illuminate the Parthenon for you."

It was close on one o'clock when this letter arrived, and Margery had but glanced through it when Arnold came in. She had quite fallen back into the ordered usance of the house, and never saw him till the sacred hours of the morning

were over. To-day he came in with beaming cheerfulness; she, quick to read him, knew that the work must have gone well. Nothing else just at present stood so much in the foreground of his life.

"Good morning, little woman," he said. "How quietly you stole down to-day. I had no idea when you made your descent. Or was it that I was more than usually absorbed? Any news?"

There was a letter in the *Times* about some excavations made by the British School of Archæology at Athens on the site of Sparta. Margery had just noted the fact, though she felt too tired and listless to read the communication.

"Something about Sparta in the *Times*," she said. "And I heard from Walter."

He took up the paper and glanced at it.

"Yes, before my epoch," he remarked. "And what of Walter?"

She handed him the letter.

"He wants us to go out," she said. "What a pity we can't!"

Arnold glanced through the letter, and laughed with just a shade of annoyance.

"I don't think Walter has the slightest idea of the scale on which I am writing," he said, "when he asks if the book isn't nearly finished yet. I might as well ask if he will be an ambassador soon."

He looked at Margery as he gave it her back, and was struck by her pallor and listlessness. The doctor had said that probably a change of air would do her good after her

illness, and Walter's notion seemed to him to have something in it. Not that he could go himself; that, of course, was not to be thought of.

"Though, after all, how should Walter know?" he said. "Since, really, I do not think I bore the general public with detail about the work which I know appeals to so few. But this idea of going out to Athens. Would you like it, dear?"

Margery's face brightened.

"Oh, Arnold, you don't mean it, do you?" she asked. "I should love it — love it! I just long to get away; one feels like that after influenza. And you would be able to work so well out there on the spot ——"

Margery had completely misunderstood. He hastened to put her right.

"My darling, what are you thinking of?" he said. "I can't possibly go. I dare not. Athens might not suit me, the work would be interrupted, and who knows when I might pick up the thread again? I was referring to Walter's idea that you and Olive might go out."

The light died out of her face again.

"And what are you thinking of," she asked, "if you imagine I could leave you?"

A chill tattoo of rain sounded on the window, and he glanced up, while the medley of reflections which had been suggested to him by the speed and brilliance of his week of absolutely uninterrupted work suddenly took shape and form.

"One of those October squalls," he said. "Let us sit and talk instead of going out. And let us be two very sensible

people. Now, dear. You want change; you need it, while change for me just now would be really hazardous. It sounds dreadfully egoistic to talk about inspiration, but certainly I am in the happiest vein of work, and I dare not meddle with it or alter the conditions which are so favourable to it. And all the time you were upstairs, Margery, all that dreary week, the work-vein was at its happiest. So you must not think that you are deserting me, if I persuade you, as I mean to do, to go away, even if not to Athens. You need change for your health. Take it, dear, and while you are away think of me as tremendously occupied, frenziedly busy. Dear me, what a lot I shall have to read you when you come back."

Through Margery's brain, all unbidden, but quite lucid and distinct, came the thought: "He wants to be alone; he would sooner I was not here." Then, so close on its heels that none but she could have said there was any interval between the two, came her heart's comment on it. "Of course I will go; of course he shall be alone if he wishes." And nothing but that appeared in her speech.

"Yes, I do believe a change would do me good," she said; "though I think Athens is rather too long a flight alone, or, anyhow, without you. But, as you really won't be lonely without me, I shall write to your mother and propose myself for a week. She is back in Norfolk now; I heard from her yesterday. So the two sensible people have settled it."

But all the time something that dwelt in the innermost place of her heart cried out and rebelled. She shut her ears to its cry, she barred up the rebel. But the echoes of the weeping voice reached her, though only remotely and con-

fusedly. It called out dreadful comparisons, shouting to her to imagine what Walter would have done had he been in Arnold's place, what she would have done if she had been in Arnold's place and he in hers. And she shut her ears more tightly yet.

Mrs. Morrison had come over to inquire about Margery once or twice during the last ten days, but she had not gone upstairs to see her niece, not, as she was careful to explain, because she feared infection herself, but because it was not right to risk carrying it to Olive. She drove over again this afternoon and found Margery in, for the October squall had developed into half a gale of driven rain, and she had not gone out. Arnold was house-bound, also, but on the appearance of Mrs. Morrison's motor, had retreated delicately to his room.

"And I declare I should scarcely have known you, my dear Margery," she said, with her usual tactful felicity — "so pulled down and pale as you look! But though it was such a wet day, I thought I must come over to see you, for what with your leaving London right at the beginning of the season like that" — Mrs. Morrison had not nearly got over her resentful mystification on this subject, and was moving the date of their departure steadily earlier — "and your shutting yourself up here all these months, it is seldom enough I get a peep at you. We have had some most amusing people staying with us, Mr. Trefusis who writes those delightful novels, and when I told him that it was in order that Arnold should have quiet for the writing of his book, he could scarcely believe his ears, for he says it must be impossible to write without stimulus, and I should think he

ought to know, considering he runs through edition after edition. I suppose Arnold's book will be quite finished by now, and you will be having some parties, though I'm sure you don't look up to entertaining anybody."

"Oh, I'm not going to try!" said Margery. "Indeed, I'm going away myself in a few days, if Mrs. Leveson can have me. Arnold stops here to go on with his book, which isn't nearly finished yet. But it's going on beautifully. You see, Mr. Trefusis may want one sort of stimulus, and Arnold another."

"I'm sure I should be puzzled to say what stimulus a man could find in seeing nobody but his wife, especially if she has the influenza and is going away," said Mrs. Morrison. "I often have to take myself to task for being inclined to get lazy and idle in the country, and Olive told me only the other day, on Wednesday I think, that she gets through less work here than when we are in the whirl of London. And if she is to be considered as having an unnatural craving for excitement, I am sure it is the first I have heard of it. But perhaps you are right, and I have been wrong all these years."

Margery had a helpless feeling, to which those who talked to Mrs. Morrison were not strangers, that she had no idea what she was talking about. But that was Mrs. Morrison's way. Like a carrier-pigeon, she was accustomed to take several wide circles first, before she settled the direction in which to fly. If nothing of the nature of a landmark appeared, she continued to circle until she was tired. She circled a little more now, though something was beginning to catch her eye.

"Walter, too," she continued — though why she said "too" is a phenomenon of baffling mystery — "Walter, too, writes to me in a way I cannot understand. He wants Olive to go out to see him there, or was it Olive who suggested that? Anyhow, he seems most unsettled, and not certain if he can get back home for a week at Christmas or not. One hardly knows what to do, whether to tell people he is coming home, or that he is not. It sounds so foolish to say one does not know, since it is not unreasonable that I should be supposed to know what my only son's plans are. If I had a large family, it would be different, and I should understand. But what I ask myself is, what can have occurred to make him so vague and unsettled?"

Margery could only guess herself, but she quite frankly gave her aunt her conjecture for what it was worth.

"I heard from him only this morning," she said, "and in his letter he says he hopes that Arnold and I, or, failing him, Olive and I, may come out and pay him a visit. Very likely he is only waiting to hear from me before making his plans about coming home."

The landmark appeared; Mrs. Morrison flew straight for it, though in speech she pretended to be going in an opposite direction.

"That does not sound to me in the least likely, Margery," she said. "From what I know of Walter it is quite foreign to him to treat me in this way, neither saying yes or no, while he waits for you to settle whether you will come to visit him. I do not know Walter, if I am to think you are right about that. It is true that once in his mere boyhood — well, there is no reason to go into that. But in any case, your explana-

tion seems to me to be very far-fetched. He could easily have said to you: 'Do not arrange to come at Christmas, as I shall be at Ballards then,' or 'Christmas will suit excellently, as I have no intention of being at Ballards then.' No; I should not wonder if he had got interested in some Greek girl, probably of no family at all, for I am told that society at Athens is so mixed that you may be talking to a Turk or an infidel without suspecting it, of no family at all, I say, and with the inflammatory nature he has, which he inherited from I don't know whom, is dangling after her. I do not mind saying these things to you now, since you are a married woman, though I should not dream of saying them to Olive, who, though she is so much older than you, has been the victim of disappointed hopes. Not that she ever complains, for she has a self-respect which does her credit, and I may say, me also, for though I was married out of the schoolroom, that was but a mere accident; and in other ways Olive is singularly like what I was when I was her age. And I am sure no one will be sorrier than Olive when she hears, not that I shall tell her, but things get about in a most extraordinary manner, that you are going away without your husband, and if it would be at all a comfort to you to tell me about it, Margery, I shall be very happy to listen, and give you the best advice I can. But as for Walter not being able to settle whether he is coming home or not for Christmas, just because you may be going out to Athens, I can only say that I am sure it is all the greatest nonsense, and that such a notion never entered his head. I shall tell him it didn't when next I write. Besides which, it would be impossible for you to attempt to make so long a journey then."

The futility and discursiveness of these remarks were not quite so wild as they sounded. They were not anyhow a mere handful of loose beads taken up at random out of Mrs. Morrison's mind, and pelted at Margery, but were, so to speak, all on one thread. And the thread that bound them together into this ornamental whole was, broadly speaking, spite. The frequency of Walter's visits to Elmhurst during his leave had been sufficient to make her fear that he had not "got over" his absurd infatuation for Margery, and her disgusting mind liked putting that idea into Margery's head, saddling her with having thought of it, and then contradicting it. Similarly, for Olive's sake, as she would have admitted, if pressed on the subject — she liked to imagine that something was wrong between Margery and Arnold, and liked suggesting that to Margery. And at the bottom of this amazing tissue of false suggestion there was, unhappily, an underlying truth. Walter was in love with Margery, and everything was not quite right between Margery and her husband. But the whole of the superstructure was as unreal as the colour of her hair, which she had lately caused to be dyed.

But if she really hoped to get anything out of Margery by this wild brandishing of words, she was doomed to disappointment. Margery listened till she had quite finished, and a little heightening of colour alone showed that she had heard. And in her heart was nothing but a sort of wondering pity. Then she rose and rang the bell.

"How nice of you to come on such a wet day and give me all the news, Aunt Aggie," she said. "Though it is so early, shall we have tea? I think one always wants tea earlier on wet afternoons."

"But you tell me nothing, Margery," said Mrs. Morrison, making an appeal, as insults had no effect. "Of course all young couples, though I am sure Arnold might have married some one nearer his own age, have their little disagreements. I remember one I had with my husband, which began about curry, just curry at lunch, when I must have been even younger than you, and from curry there was no telling to what lengths it would have gone if I had not had a little tact and cleverness, though that was no credit to me, since I suppose I inherited them. Or shall I ask Arnold what has been the cause of this resolve of yours to go away without him, and see what can be done?"

Margery, still weak from her influenza, felt a little dazed. It was as if somebody said: "Do confess about this dreadful thing that has happened!" when nothing dreadful had happened. But all the time there came a little remote cry from the imprisoned denizen, which wanted to say what his account of the matter was. Only he did not want to say it to Aunt Aggie.

"The cause of my going away, Aunt Aggie," said Margery, "is that I really rather want a change. The cause of Arnold's not going with me is that he is very busy with his book. I think you take sugar, don't you? Tell Mr. Leveson that tea is ready," she said to the footman, "and that Mrs. Morrison would like to see him."

"Do not let us disturb him if he is at work," said that lady rather hastily. "I always made it a point of not disturbing poor Leonard when he was busy. Men hate being disturbed, and ——"

"You needn't go to Mr. Leveson," said Margery to the

servant. "And cream, Aunt Aggie, or milk? How odd that I should forget, when I have seen you have tea so many times! Do let me guess: I think it is milk with a little cream as well. I remember Olive's plan quite distinctly. She always had milk with just a little tea poured into it. And Walter had cream and four lumps of sugar, and, for preference, tea that had been standing and had got cool and black. After all, I don't remember so badly."

Margery had won; Mrs. Morrison retired baffled, and talked about Pug, with hardly diminished volubility. But she did not propose to forget Margery's secretiveness. There was no question about forgiving it; such an idea never occurred to her.

When her aunt had gone, Margery found herself longing for fresh air — fresh air, that is to say, of the mental kind, something to breathe freely, for she had the impression of having been obliged to hold her breath for fear of inhaling a very stuffy, if not poisonous, atmosphere. She made no attempt, from any feeling of just indignation, to recollect what her aunt had said, or to recite the excellent causes she had for anger; she merely wanted to forget all about it, not give it another moment's harbourage in her brain. And if only Arnold would read to her, she could think of no more admirable breeze to send through her mind, a breeze that would take her on to the sunlit heights of the Acropolis, show her the wonderful temple to the virgin goddess of wisdom, now a-building in his book. White and dazzling was the marble of which it was made, hewn from the purple sides of Pentelicus, and the building was worthy of her in whose honour it was built. It was not Arnold's regular time for

work; he had only retreated to avoid Mrs. Morrison, and Margery was not trespassing on sacred hours. So she went to his study and entered.

He did not hear her entry, but he was not writing; his eyes were fixed dreamily on the wall opposite, though the pen was in his hand and the ink of the last words not yet dry. Then he turned his head slowly and saw her, and it was as if he woke out of a dream.

"Margery!" he said incredulously. "You here?"

Then — it was no pose in him, he had been literally absorbed — he gave a little upward gesture of his head, a little shrug of his shoulders.

"Ah, tea is ready or something equally important!" he said. "You startled me; I had no conception really where I was. Let us have tea then; I am back at Elmhurst."

Margery gave a dismal little sigh.

"Oh, dear, I am so sorry!" she said. "It wasn't your regular hour for work, you see, and you came in here to avoid Aunt Aggie. I didn't think I should be interrupting you."

He looked at her pale, tired face, touching in its appeal.

"Well, well, my dear," he said; "it is of no consequence. No doubt I shall be able to get back the thread of what I was writing. I think I will go on writing for the present, Margery. Do not wait tea for me."

Margery went to stay with her mother-in-law a day or two after this, intending originally to remain with her for a week. But toward the end of that time she received a letter so urgently expressed from her husband, begging her not to hurry back, but consolidate her convalescence, that she stopped with her another ten days. In that time she had

quite renewed her usual serenity of health, and returned home with all her enthusiasm for his work rekindled, and aware from her changed attitude, how nearly at one time she had come to hating this writing, exquisite though it was, that had grown to isolate her from her husband. But when she came back she found that this isolation had grown immeasurably greater during her absence. Hitherto, when not writing he had distracted himself from the age of Pericles, but now, when strolling with her, or at meals, it seemed that no more than the mere mechanical part of his brain, that which moved his limbs or chewed his food, was at his command. Sometimes he would rouse himself and ask what she had been doing, or what she was going to do, but the contact with her or any of the ordinary interests of life was as light and as momentary as the contact of drifting thistle-down, that, having touched earth, rebounded again into the current of the wind that swept it along. The readings, too, by which Margery felt that she was kept in touch with him and the workings of that weaving mind, were discontinued. He found, with regret, that to go back to an earlier part of his work dulled the fineness of perception with which he handled the current chapter. Margery, it is true, was at liberty to take sections from his pile of completed manuscript and read them to herself, but even this was found not to work satisfactorily, for he had occasion now and then to refer to these earlier chapters or insert a cross-reference, and thus the morning hours or the sacred evening was interrupted. So also was Margery's reading.

Throughout the autumn months and through the snowy days of wintry December the solitary sundered life of the

two pursued its uninterrupted course. But some day the book would be finished — and Margery found it necessary to seek for consolatory thoughts — and he would come back to her. At present she felt, and felt truly, that she had no significant existence for him; she who sat opposite him at table, or walked by his side on the path that had been swept of its slush, was no more to him than the footman who handed dishes or the snow-capped shrubs. All that she was capable of, with regard to him, was not to interrupt him. About irruption into the study she had already learned her lesson, and there was no more of that, but in subtler ways she might interrupt him by not being where he expected her to be. He might miss her opposite him at table, as he might miss an elm that had fallen down. Everything had to be just as he expected it; he did not want anything of the familiar affairs that surrounded him, except their mere presence. Their absence might be upsetting. Naturally, there was no thought of guests coming to stay in the house, and even less of any of those very numerous invitations which desired the presence of Margery and her husband being accepted. The essential was that the sheaf of manuscript should be given its opportunity to grow, till the last page was written. Certainly, no thought of other dispositions of the time entered his brain, and if into Margery's any burglarious entry was forced, she repelled the intruder.

No chronicle, therefore, of the last three months of the year is possible, except that it may be said that Mrs. Morrison continued to wonder what it was all about. Until the illuminating Mr. Trefusis had spoken so freely on the subject of writing books she had felt that there might be some

mysterious cabalism necessary for their production. But when he had said that he constantly dined out or had friends to dinner, even when his entertaining works were in the throes of conception or execution, she confessed to herself and Olive that she did not understand what ailed Arnold. Perhaps he was ill — that was by far the most charitable of the various solutions that occurred to her, and if so, Margery ought to insist on his seeing a doctor instead of going on saying that he was writing a book. It was mere folly, too, to tell people that he had been writing a book every day since the middle of June. Books did not take as long as that to be written: Mr. Trefusis dashed them off in no time without all this fuss of not going out to dinner and calling it stimulus.

Then, in January, about the middle of a dark and depressing month, events began to move again, and the psychical effect of these industrious, solitary weeks came into action.

It was in the middle of the sacred morning hours: eleven had chimed from the stable clock, but it was not yet near twelve, and Margery, as usual, had seen the cook, had written her letters, and was slightly at a loss to know what to do on this morning of rain and gusty wind that drove sheets of pattering drops against the panes and sent stinging discharges of smoke down the chimney. Arnold's chimney was the worst offender, and he had implied, when he fetched a coat to work in, having beaten the fire out, that somebody not he, ought to have seen to it somehow. For the last week or more she had seen that some change was taking place in the manner of his mental activities — though still very industrious and sitting for longer hours than ever before over his

work, he was losing his serenity, and looked worried and anxious. There had been days, too, of but fitful occupation: once he had taken a morning's holiday and had fallen asleep in a chair in the drawing-room, and more than once he had cut short the evening spell of work and challenged Margery to a duel at Patience instead. And as she looked out through the blurred window panes to-day, wishing that she was a little more occupied, he a little less, she wondered to what this change was going to lead. There were, as he had told her only to-day, several more months' work in front of him before he could even expect to see the end of the book, and she was afraid he was beginning to get overworked. If he only would stop for a few weeks! She had suggested that: his answer had been the renewal of his industry. Even while this thought was in her head he entered.

"I have stuck," he said. "I can't get on at all. For the last ten days this has been threatening. What's the matter with me?"

Margery's hands were outstretched toward him; it was as if she held her heart in them.

"Why, nothing is the matter with you, dear," she said, "except that you are tired. My darling, think what you've been doing — working without break for over six months. Now you shall shut every book up till you are rested again, and we'll play."

"I wonder if that's it," he said. "I feel as if I had run up against a blank wall. I can't plan my sentences: I know what I have got to say, but I can't say it."

"And you shan't try to," said Margery. "Why, you told me that just the same thing had happened when you were

doing the Alexandria book. What a good thing I'm here to play with you."

He turned eyes of tenderness on her.

"You darling," he said. "I believe you are right. Anyhow, it is the most likely explanation. But I expect you'll have to teach me how to play — I've forgotten."

She laughed, happier just then than she had been for months.

"Oh, no, you haven't, though very likely you are a little out of practice. You shall begin gently by sitting down in that chair and smoking a cigarette and reading the paper."

"I think I will tidy up my work first," he said, "if I really am going to have a holiday."

"All right; I will come with you. Oh, it will be nice to have a morning together again."

"What does one do, if one doesn't work?" he said. "Really, I have forgotten."

"You shall see," said Margery. "Now, the papers first. Oh, Arnold, is that great pile there all completed manuscript? No wonder you have forgotten everything else. And here's the last page, isn't it? That goes at the bottom of the rest. And all the phrases on the slips of paper? You will keep them, won't you? There, that's all put to bed."

A week of idleness followed, during which Margery stuck bravely to a very uphill task indeed. With the cessation of his work the zest had gone out of life for the present — anyhow, for her husband. It was quite true, as he had said, that he had forgotten how to play. She urged him to have people to stay, but the idea did not appeal to him; she

suggested that they should pay a couple of visits together, or go somewhere on the south coast where they might hope to find sun and a greater clemency of weather. But this found as little favour with him, and from day to day he grew more apathetic and more clearly bored. That simple word expressed more accurately than could pages of analysis his state of mind, and Margery faced it. He was here alone with her, and bored. It seemed to her quite natural that he should find it dull, and she did her best to suggest distractions for him. But he did not want them: the taste had gone, and he looked with longing eyes toward the vanished Athens and the days of Pericles.

So for him she had to invent distractions, and, if not amusement, devices to make the hours pass less intolerably. But on her own account she had to fight a more potent enemy, namely, the sense of bitter disappointment that she could do so little to make him happy and serene.

It was not toward her, but toward his vanished Athens, that he turned his eyes, and an idea began to form itself in his mind. What if he went there for a week or two? It was no new idea in itself — there had been thoughts of Margery in the autumn going alone. She would not now be able to go with him, since she expected her child before the end of February, but he could easily go there for a week or two and be back before that. He wanted, and always had wanted, to go there — indeed, before the book was finished a visit would be necessary, and this seemed so opportune an occasion. Frankly, this solitude here was not an entire success: no doubt Margery was right, and he wanted a change, even as she had done in the autumn. But it was foolish to

go boring oneself in hotels on the south coast, and he felt that to stay in other people's houses and be in evidence all day, or to have people staying here, would be an intolerable affliction. There was London, it was true, but just now London was empty of people and full of fogs. He wanted none of these things.

One thing only deterred him, the uncertainty as to how Margery would take the proposal. It would have been quite an ideal plan if she had been able to come with him, but, though she could not, he hoped that she might still welcome it. On the other hand, it was possible that she might be hurt, though that would be unreasonable, since he in the autumn had encouraged her to do exactly the same thing by herself. While he was away she could stay with some of those numerous people who were always scolding her for burying herself in the country, or have them to stay here. And this also occurred to him — they had been quite alone for the last seven months; it was time they had a little change. She was the dearest, far the dearest, thing in the world; he loved her as he had never loved any one else, but surely a little change was reasonable. She would understand — surely she would understand.

Patience behaved in a lamb-like manner that evening, and Arnold had played his three games before ten o'clock. The day had been particularly vile, and neither he nor Margery had stirred out of doors. The papers had been empty of interest; the novel that Margery had recommended him had only served the purpose of making him fall asleep after tea. Yet, perhaps, it could not have done better: he had slept for nearly an hour. And now, on the conclusion of the

third game, Margery had come and sat by his chair on the floor, leaning back against his knees, and he found himself wondering what to talk about. Then the Athens idea occurred to him with sudden and overwhelming attractiveness, and he determined to speak.

"Margery, dear, I've got a plan," he began.

Margery instantly interrupted.

"Oh, I am glad," she said. "Is it a nice one?"

"I think so. But I don't know what you will think of it."

Margery nestled back a little farther, pressing one of her shoulders between his knees.

"There, I am comfortable," she said; "now tell me the plan. I enjoy things more when I am comfortable."

"Well, dear, I think I want a change," he said. "I certainly have rather overworked, and it is not easy to settle down to do nothing when one has been very busy."

"As if I didn't know that," said she, "and as if I hadn't been suggesting every place and person that I could think of to amuse you. But have you thought of anything? Is that the plan? I do hope so."

"Yes. Athens — just for a couple of weeks."

Margery gave a great sigh.

"Oh, dear, I wish I had thought of that," she said; "and how I wish I could come with you. You will have to go without me, you know; but, after all, you will find Walter there, so he'll look after you."

"Then you approve?"

"As if I could help approving. It's a perfect plan. It will give you holiday, and yet the holiday will be soaking into you and feeding you. I shall miss you dreadfully, but I

wouldn't have you not go for anything. I wish you could start to-morrow, but there's no reason why you shouldn't go the day after. Send a telegram to Walter, put a tooth-brush in a piece of paper, and go," said Margery dramatically. "But what in the world made you think I shouldn't approve?"

"Just what you have said — that you will miss me dreadfully."

"Yes, dear, and you'll miss me," said Margery placidly.

She laughed quietly, laying her face against his knee.

"And now, confess, dear," she said. "Haven't you been bored this last ten days? Of course you have, but I really did suggest all the things I could think of. You couldn't help being bored; quite suddenly all the tension and interest was removed, and of course you went slack. You needn't confess."

She hid her face from him a moment.

"But you'll be back by the middle of February, won't you?" she said. "Not before. Take three weeks there, and, oh, I hope you will have a delicious time, and every moment I shall wish you back, and every moment I shall be delighted you are not."

All Margery's heart was in her voice, there was no back-thought in her mind of any sort. And with soft, shining eyes she again raised her head and looked at him.

CHAPTER XIV

ARNOLD was sitting at the writing-table in his sitting-room at his hotel, overlooking the big square in front of the Royal Palace at Athens. The table — the largest that the proprietor could find him, was a ranged battle-field of books and papers, which had arrived from England two days before. The books formed a rampart all along the edge, and were kept erect by two small blocks of Pentalic marble, which he had picked up on the Acropolis on the first day of his arrival, and had furtively pocketed. In front of the books lay packets of orderly papers, tall among which was the manuscript of his book. A Tanagra figurine, which he had bought yesterday, slim, gracious, insouciante, stood by his inkstand, and round his blotting-pad was spread the mosaic of felicitous phrases already largely added to. Margery, dear girl, had forgotten nothing; she had even sent out his pens and inkstand, so that he might not have to get accustomed to unfamiliar implements. She had also written him the most heartfelt note of congratulation at the fact of his needing all his materials again, though was he quite sure he was wise in beginning work again so soon? It was a dear note, and he had read it through twice. He was, however, quite sure that he was wise in beginning work again. He could not, indeed, do otherwise; it was an irresistible compulsion that he obeyed.

He had been in Athens a little more than a week, but the

moment he set foot in the town of matchless beauty and immortal memories the magic of its spell was on him. For three days he did no more than wander, strolling up to the Acropolis after breakfast, sitting for a space, maybe, on the steps of the Temple of Wingless Victory, then with hushed step going gently through the glittering doorways of the Propylæa to find himself faced by the supreme temple. It was no wonder that the place so moved him; for seven months now he had been absorbed and steeped in the history of the wonderful people, and now when it was made incarnate to the eye, the weight and weariness were lifted from his brain, and the vigour of the age he wrote of revivified him. Nor was it that alone; he saw how truly he had grasped and realized the spirit of that age; all through his book he had referred all the splendours of their achievements to that which wholly dominated them, their worship and love of beauty. Flawless were the works of their hands and heads; there was no possibility of arguing about the taste of this ornamentation or the proportion of that column. It was simpler and safer to take them for what they were — perfect examples of the beauty of form — and remodel art's taste, if necessary, till it admitted that, saw it, believed it.

But the magic extended outside the town and its white marbles; to him the whole of Attica was sacred soil, and it was with a sense of awe and wonder, second only to that which he experienced when he first set foot on the Acropolis, that one afternoon he went up Pentelicus with Walter, Pentelicus out of whose marble flanks was taken the stone that crowned the Acropolis with its white splendours. Higher and higher they climbed, the horizon of the sea rising with

them till it overtopped the peak of Hymettus even, and from the top, looking down, there were sacred memories on every side. Far away across the dim blue of the straits slept Eubœa, and below them there was a little semicircular bay fringed with yellow sand, and that was Marathon, where the might of the barbaric East was throttled. Then on the other side, beyond the boulder-strewn hill up which they had come, lay the plain of Attica, Acropolis-rock standing sentinel in its midst. Farther again was the sea, the bay of Phalerum, Salamis, Ægina — words that were music in themselves to the ear — but below lurked the music of their meaning, their symphony of deathless melodies.

Walter had understood his mood well.

"I know you haven't come here to dance and dine," he said, "so I shan't bother you. I'm here, that's all. If you want anything, ask me. I know you like walking in the afternoon, so I'll be charmed to come out with you any and every day if you'll let me know. Otherwise I'll leave you to Pericles."

Three days passed thus, he drinking deep of the place, and finding in it, as must always happen, what he had brought to it, feeling his deep reverence for the creators of it indorsed and ratified. And then with the suddenness of lightning-stroke the absolute necessity of setting to work again came upon him. A telegram must be dispatched at once to Margery, and all the books in the revolving bookcase by his writing-table, all the manuscript, everything connected with his work, had to be sent out, registered and insured, by the quickest possible method of transit. He could not even wait for their arrival, but began at once on what was to be the

introduction to the book, the description of Athens as it was before the age of Pericles, and the description of Athens when his sculptors and builders had done their work. He had intended — and how inadequate would have been the execution, as he saw now — to write that merely from his knowledge. What a valley of dry bones would that have been! Now, quickened by the sight, the dry bone would live, stand up. The dimensions of the Parthenon, the number of its columns, the arrangement of its frieze and its metopes, were, of course, already minutely known to him. What he had not known was that the living Parthenon was standing there, like some beautiful living thing, domed by a sky whose blue was of a quality he had never dreamed of, glittering here with dazzling whiteness, here stained a molten orange-red by the winds of the northwest, not built, or so it seemed, by mortal hands, but growing out of the gray rock, a flower, a star. . . .

He could scarcely believe that it was the same self which for his last ten days of work in England had groped and stumbled along crabbed and infelicitous sentences, and which when work was abandoned felt neither zest nor any joy in life, as that which now passed eager and transfigured hours. The contrast between those cold dark days of January back there in England, and the crisp warm splendour of these February noons was not more marked than the difference between his slack and weary brain as it had been last month and the sparkling vigour of it now. The enchanted things he saw, as he walked and sat alone, musing, brooding, drinking in, seemed of their own volition, by virtue of some magic inherent in themselves, to transform themselves into jewelled

sentences, nor lose one ray of the sunlight in which they were steeped. Creation to him in these Athenian days was without travail or labour; he wrote with the rapture of the singing bird.

He often thought of Margery — thought of her with love and tenderness, and wrote to her by every mail. But it would be idle to say that he missed her, for while he lived like this in the intoxication of the town which was truly home to his mind, and while his intellect, like some long-winged bird with pinions stretched to the uttermost, soared every day higher into the blaze of its morning, it was scarcely possible for him to miss her, nor did he really any longer wish that she was with him. He wanted no distraction, he wanted the company of nobody, and since his books and apparatus had arrived he had scarcely set eyes on Walter. The well-ordered hotel gave him excellent meals at stated hours and separate tables; no wifely concern could have oiled the wheels of material existence so as to produce smoother running. And soon, so often, those golden days would be over and he would be flying homeward again, unwilling yet eager, torn away from what he loved intellectually to join her who was his wife and was very dear to him, and wait with her for the birth of their child.

The days passed with dreadful swiftness, and when one evening he laid down his pen after a long spell of work far into the night, he remembered, with a pang of emptiness and sinking, that he had but another clear day here. And only to-day the Greek Government had begun on an excavation which to him was full of absorbing interest, and promised to settle once and for all the site of the famous long walls which

once united Peiræus with Athens. A few days more would certainly show whether they were on the right track or not, but a few days more were precisely what Arnold could not give. A few days more, too, would see his introduction finished, and who could tell whether, when back in the mists and chillness of an English February, he would be able to recapture that inspiration which here possessed him? Further, when once he left Athens, he knew that it was likely that his work would have to suffer a long interruption, since his time would be much taken up, and the anxiety which would necessarily attend the birth of his child would surely make it impossible to give his writing that undivided attention which it so insistently claimed.

He strolled out on to his balcony; the square was very quiet and empty, and above the houses he could see the top of the Acropolis, sleeping in brilliant moonshine. The sky was quite clear, and full of large burning stars, and from the Palace gardens to the left, though the month was still only February, came the liquid bubbles of the first nightingales. Fragments of deathless Greek song and echoes of enchanted myths rang in his head, myths of Philomela and Procris, made immortal, it is true, in English by the lyrics of that master of the lyric mood, but derived and borrowed from Greek song, and Attic nights, such as was now turned to ivory by the moonlight that fell on wood and mountain and carved column and lintel of marble doorways, and the far-off shining of a tranquil sea. Forty-eight hours later he would be on some ship, every turn of whose screw bore him farther from the enchanted land. Already he would have watched the shores recede, and sink below the horizon of

Greek seas, and Walter would remain here, dining and dancing, looking with less than tourist's eyes on temples that were familiar to him as he walked by them on his way to an excruciating golf links or a grilled and pebbly lawn-tennis court. A good fellow was Walter, but a little barbarian in taste. He had accompanied Arnold to the scene of excavation this afternoon, and had got tired of watching the gradual reëmergence of the long wall, and had gone to have a game of tennis before dinner. Tennis! When the long walls were on the point of being exhumed, and one could watch them. If only he could be in Walter's place for a few weeks, without the ties that drew him homeward. And Walter would be so glad to be able to go to England for a few weeks. Only to-day he had said that he was really thinking of taking his next year's leave in two pieces — a month now, a month later, if it could be arranged. Really it was an irony of fate.

It was more ironical than he knew. Walter at the same moment was looking out from his balcony on the other side of the square, not cursing at, but certainly not being appreciative of, the nightingale and the moonlight. And he thought with longing of the clear note of the blackbird, as he scudded over the lawn on chill February mornings, of the cold and misty days, of the half-hour of swift riding that so many times had brought him from Ballards to the garden at Elmhurst.

And then suddenly Arnold made his resolve. It was as likely as not, more likely than not, that if he went off by Thursday's boat he would arrive in England a fortnight before there was the least necessity for his being there. He

would at any rate telegraph to Margery asking whether he could stop another week. She would understand that; she would say "Yes" or "No," according to the circumstances.

His telegram went off early next morning, and the reply was waiting for him when he came in at sunset from the breathless suspense of an afternoon at the excavations. The authorities in charge had been most civil, and allowed him to go into the trenches and examine this piece of wall which was being followed. It consisted largely of hewn stones, evidently not hewn for the place they occupied, but removed from the ruins or sites of earlier buildings. Nearly a hundred yards of it had been exhumed, and Arnold pored over each stone as its covering of earth was removed. A single stone, therefore, later than the Periclean age, a single fragment bearing sculpture or carving subsequent to that date, would prove that this was not one of the long walls. But at present none bears mark of a later date, none showed that this structure, whatever it was (and hourly the identification was becoming more likely), was later than age of Pericles. Walter had walked down there with him again this afternoon, but had quickly wearied of the slow process and had gone off to pay an overdue call. He was going to dine at the hotel with Arnold that night.

Arnold went straight back when work stopped at sunset, and found the answer to his telegram waiting for him.

"Pray stop another week," it ran. "Delighted with your delight, Margery."

Another week — that meant so much to him. In another week the question of the long walls would be solved; in another week the introduction to his book (and how good it

was he could not help knowing) would be finished. And when Walter came in that evening, he sprang up radiantly to greet him.

"And it is not my last night after all, my dear Walter," he said. "Margery wants me to stop another week, which I shall do. It seems there is no hurry about my getting back, and another week here will suit me very well. Let us come in to dinner. And your plans?" he asked, as they sat down.

"The opposite of yours," said Walter. "I can take a month's leave now. So I shall go to-morrow, and have another month in the autumn."

"Probably it will be my berth that you will occupy," said Arnold. "The steamer is very full, they told me. I hope there will be fewer passengers next week."

A certain constraint had fallen on Walter. He could not picture to himself Arnold's point of view. It seemed to him utterly inhuman. So, like a wise young man, he talked of something else.

"I shall go to Ballards," he said, "as my mother is staying in the country till Easter."

"So pray go and see Margery," said Arnold, wrenching Walter's thoughts back again.

"Of course I will, loaded with your messages. Load me now."

Arnold was engaged in the dissection of a red mullet, and a moment's thought told him what was the Greek for this excellent fish. Then he answered.

"You need not take my love," he said, "because that is already there. But tell her about this excavation of the long

walls, how every sign seems to show that the site, which I long ago conjectured, is the true one."

"Will she understand that?" asked Walter.

"I think she will — I think I read as far as that with her. I shall have to add an appendix or rewrite the section. Anyhow, she knows that this point of topography is a vital one. The street of tombs, for instance; it was hardly likely that they would leave that outside the walls. But I know, my dear fellow, that this does not particularly interest you."

"But I want to get the message for Margery right," said Walter. "I am sure it interests her."

"I think it does, and when we go upstairs after dinner I can show you the point on the map. You will quite understand it then. My mother is at Elmhurst, too, I think. I know Margery thought of stopping down there, and asking her to come. Oh, yes, in her last letter Margery said that she had come. Of course the position of the long walls is of tremendous importance. The character of the Greek is concerned, as to whether they left their cemetery outside or inside the lines of fortification. There is much to be said on both sides. My dear Walter, I apologize; I am talking shop again. Did you find the Russian minister in?"

Walter laughed.

"That is shop of mine," he said. "That won't do."

Arnold met the young man's eye. It was extremely friendly and interested.

"Well then, Margery," he said. "Your first cousin and my wife. Isn't that a topic free from any imputation of shop?"

"By all means," said Walter quietly.

Walter had to make his arrangements for going that night, since his boat left at eleven next morning, and an hour later having had the possibilities of the long walls explained to him, he was standing on the steps of the hotel lighting a last cigarette. And then he said two words:

"Good God!" were the two. There was nothing more from this point of view that could be said.

Meantime at Elmhurst the fortnight of Arnold's absence had passed very happily for Margery. His letters brimming with content and sun and news of successful work showed her how right she had been to encourage him to go, and day by day she triumphed over Mrs. Leveson, who at first had not quite liked his absence. He ought not to have wished to be away now, and she could not understand at first how Margery wished him to be absent. But by degrees she saw: it was for the simplest of all reasons, namely, that she wished it merely because he did. For her that was amply sufficient, and consequently her mother-in-law had to acquiesce, since there was no use in arguing against a reason like that. This morning she had been out when his telegram came, and had not returned till after Margery had sent her reply. But before Margery could tell her about it, she saw that something had happened to trouble her.

Margery was sitting at her table still fingering the pen with which she had written her answer, when her mother-in-law returned; otherwise, a thing rare with her, she was unoccupied.

"Anything the matter, dear?" said Mrs. Leveson, as soon as she saw her.

Margery raised a troubled face.

"Oh, only that I'm making a goose of myself," she said.

"I am sorry. Let's see if we can't pluck the goose together. What is it?"

"Arnold," said Margery, with an effort. "He telegraphed to know if there was any reason why he should not stay another week. So, of course, I told him to stop. There is no reason why he should not stop another week. But, oh, I wish he didn't want to."

Mrs. Leveson's views on this subject were perfectly clear.

"I will send another telegram, dear," she said. "You aren't being a goose. Arnold is being a pig. Well, our little pig shall come home. I wish you had waited till I came in. Why didn't you?"

"Because I thought you might perhaps feel as you do. He wants to stop, you see. That makes such a very big piece of me want him to stop too. I had to tell him, and very cordially, I think, that I was delighted he should. But sometimes I do so wish there hadn't been any Pericles at all. I don't wish it really, you know, and I wouldn't say I did to anybody but you. No, I don't wish it. I — I don't know what Arnold would do without Pericles."

Margery laughed in a rather uncertain manner.

"Pericles or no Pericles," said Mrs. Leveson, "I shall telegraph to him on my own account."

"No, you mustn't do that," said Margery. "It would frighten and unsettle him, and I should have to send another telegram, and you would send another, and we should soon be ruined. Besides — oh, can't you understand — it isn't

only my pride that makes me want him to do what he likes, but my love. But I'm being a goose."

"I think Arnold is behaving very stupidly and very selfishly," said his mother. "And, dear, your love should want to save him from doing that."

"But I can't save him from feeling that," said Margery. "I could make him come home, but I can't make him want to."

There was tragic truth in this, and, the words once spoken, opened the door to others. The little walled-up crying prisoner in her heart came out.

"I can't imagine him wanting to stop away," she said. "At least, some part of me can't imagine it, but I dare say it is a foolish and selfish part. I want him here, and it is just that I can't tell him. If he doesn't know it by himself it is no use my saying it, for it is only the things one feels that one can understand. One can never be taught anything that one does not know. Birds — I remember watching them last summer — can teach their young to fly, because the young ones know really. But you couldn't teach me to fly by putting me on a high branch and saying, 'Now fly.' And I can't teach Arnold that I want him. He has to know it of himself."

Mrs. Leveson had sat down, and listened to this in silence.

"Am I a little beast for talking like this?" asked Margery, "I can't help it if I am. I'm going to be a little beast just for once. It hurt me when I read that telegram — oh, it hurt. It wasn't a new pain, either. I had had it before. I had it when I told him that I knew I was going to have a baby. I have never mentioned this to a single soul yet. If

Arnold hurt me on purpose I don't think I should mind; I should know he felt cross or angry, felt something that wasn't him. But when he hurts me unintentionally — it hurts because it is he. Is that all nonsense? I hope so — I expect so. Oh, dear, I wish I was more sensible. I wish I was more like Aunt Aggie. She would never have let Arnold go to Athens at all, and she thought that because I did we had quarrelled. That was so funny that I had to laugh. Fancy Arnold and me quarrelling. I couldn't quarrel with him. It is a silly word to use."

Margery was getting a little excited, and Mrs. Leveson did not quite like it. And, since the best way of calming excited people is not to tell them to be calm, but to be calm oneself, she answered quietly:

"Quite a silly word, dear," she said, "but you see sometimes Mrs. Morrison is silly. I will not telegraph to Arnold since you do not wish it, and, indeed, there is no reason to."

Margery looked up quickly, smiling.

"Then I am right?" she said. "I am being a goose. But I won't be."

She got up and came across to the elder woman, her serenity restored again.

"Oh, Arnold's mother," she said, "I do love you and your son. And will you forgive all the stupid and silly things I have said? But I think I was right to say them. I had bottled them up inside me and they were — well, they were going a little bad. Will you please forget about them? I shall do the same now I have opened them out. And, indeed, I can't think of anything for long together, except the one great thing. And when I think of that, do you know I

feel Arnold's dear head between my hands and I bless him, I love him."

Mrs. Leveson got up.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "I thank God every day for giving you to him. You are much too good for him, but I don't mind that."

Walter announced from Paris his immediate arrival, and appeared the morning after his telegram had been received. It was the warmest of welcomes that he got from Margery, but it required not much of an eye to see that her pleasure at having him back was in large degree the prospective pleasure of hearing the latest and the fullest news about her husband. But it was clear also that she was very glad to see him for his own sake, and in his quiet humble way he was tremendously grateful for that. To him not a hint of the vaguest and most distant kind did she give about that on which she had spoken to Mrs. Leveson, and he half absolved Arnold for his inhuman lust after long walls instead of coming home, when he saw how unfeigned a pleasure Margery took in them.

"Isn't it just the luckiest thing in the world," she said, "that Arnold should happen to be at Athens when this is going on? I should have scolded him if he had come home. He knew that, I expect. Oh, Walter, and it's lovely to see you. But tell me about Arnold first. Is the dear man frightfully happy? And did you rout him out from his work and not allow him to sit over it all day?"

"Well, I didn't want to bother him," said Walter, "and I only told him that I was always ready to go out if he wanted.

Don't you bother about him, either. He is far too well and interested to be interesting. There was a long message for you about the walls, and whether they left the cemetery outside them. I rather think they didn't. He said you would understand."

"Oh, it's thrilling," said Margery, rather evasively. "I quite see. At least, I'm sure Arnold is right about it."

"He rather thought so," said Walter.

Margery laughed.

"I don't believe you see what his work is to him," she said, "and it's a blessing I do. I like people to have minds, you know. I haven't got one myself, and it's a defect, Walter. Some day I must come out with him and see you there. You are looking so brown and well, dear. And it was nice of you to come over your very first morning. Shall we go out a bit? It is sunny to-day. And he will arrive just about a week after you. Yesterday week, that is."

Walter's impatience of him bubbled up for a moment.

"Unless he settles to stay on again," he remarked.

Margery looked at him sideways as she took his arm.

"Oh, but he won't," she said, "and I think you said that rather crossly, as if you thought he ought to have come back this week. There is spring in the air to-day, is there not? Look at the snowdrops, dear weak little darlings, and so zealous to give us the first news of spring. The birds know about it too. There was a blackbird telling about it this morning on the lawn. Such notes — flutes, just flutes. There are aconites too, and the crocuses will come soon — tender, damp, folded sheaths with hearts of gold."

"You always loved the spring, I remember," he said quietly.

"Yes; do you remember, too, how we used to make a spring-running like the dear beasts in the Jungle Book? It always ended in my tearing my frock."

"They were good days," said he.

"I know. It was you who made them dear. And I don't believe I ever thanked you for it."

"I don't think you ever did," said he. "Thank me now at once, please."

She laughed softly and pressed his arm.

"Thank you, dear Walter," she said. "Thank you for being my best friend always."

That was reward enough. He kept those words in his heart.

The rest of the week passed quietly enough, and Arnold had already left Athens, telegraphing from Patras that he was on his way home. But soon after that news had been received, the serenity and happiness which had been Margery's all those days suddenly left her. She became terribly agitated and nervous, full of unreasonable fears — fears for his safety crossing the Adriatic, fears for accidents to the train that was bringing him momentarily nearer. There had been an accident to the Brindisi express only a few days ago, and though no one was hurt the train had been delayed six hours. The thought of having to wait for an hour even after the time when he ought to arrive seemed to her intolerable. Would he telegraph, did Mrs. Leveson think, from Paris, to say he was safe so far? Would he telegraph again from Calais? Then came other fears, equally unreasonable. Walter's horse had shied as he started to ride home. She

wished he would not ride such horses. This one, as he had said, did not hanker after motor-cars, and the roads were full of them. But Aunt Aggie never thought about anybody but Pug.

Mrs. Leveson was with her and tried to quiet her.

"Margery, dear," she said, "you are talking ridiculously. How many times has Walter ridden that horse in perfect safety? And how many times does the Brindisi train have an accident? I dare say Arnold will not have time to telegraph from Paris. You must not fret if he does not."

"And there was a gale in the Channel yesterday," said Margery, with wild, frightened eyes. "Cannot we telegraph to Calais and tell him to stop there until it has gone down? Look at the trees, how they bend and crack!"

This sudden agitation was quite unexpected; no one could have foreseen it, but Mrs. Leveson at the moment would willingly have thrown all that exquisite introduction to the "Age of Pericles" into the fire if by that burnt-offering she could have brought Arnold here.

"My dear, he will not cross till to-morrow morning," she said.

"Then we can catch him at Calais. Let us telegraph. And we can telegraph to Ballards at the same time to know if Walter is safe."

Mrs. Leveson came and sat by Margery on the sofa.

"My darling, you are making a goose of yourself," she said firmly. "Now be quite quiet. I am going to ring for the nurse, and then you shall go upstairs. You are excited, and not like yourself. There is no reason for fear of any sort.

But you must be quiet, you must be wise, and do as you are told."

Trouble and fear still lingered in Margery's face.

"I will try," she said. "But Arnold ought to be here. No, I don't mean that. He didn't know; I didn't know. What shall I do?"

Mrs. Leveson rang the bell and then came back to her.

"Oh, my darling," she said, "think of your child."

Margery's baby was born early next morning. It lived — it just lived. And it went back into the dark quiet gulf out of which all life comes, into which all life goes. Margery knew what had happened. She was conscious again, and asked for her child. Thereafter, in intervals of stupor and unconsciousness, she asked if Arnold had come. She asked if the gale had subsided. She asked whether anything had been heard from him. But nothing had been heard, and she could only be told that he was coming, that he would arrive that night. The gale had gone down, and all day the sunshine of February shone whitely, and the clashing of the branches of trees was still.

All that day Mrs. Leveson sat in a corner of the big bedroom, ready to come if Margery wanted her, ready to wait in case of her doing so. The anxiety about Arnold had again taken possession of Margery's mind, and, drowsy from drugs, she awoke only to the consciousness of that.

"He is really coming?" she asked once. "You have had no news that — something else has happened?"

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Leveson, "he will be here this evening. I promise you he will."

Margery lay quiet a little. Then she spoke again.

"I was good, wasn't I?" she asked.

"Yes, dear, very good."

"Will you tell him that? Will you also tell him that — that he has no son? I should like him to know that before he sees me. Oh, poor Arnold; he will be so disappointed.

Then her voice grew drowsier.

"I am so tired," she said. "Please wake me when he comes."

Her eyelids fluttered and fell. Earlier in the day she had wished the blinds to be up so that she could see out into the sunshine. Now, very gently, so that the ticking of the blind was muffled, the nurse drew it down.

"I think she will sleep," she said to Mrs. Leveson as she passed the corner where she sat.

Long after Margery was asleep she sat there, trying to assimilate the tragedy, trying not to feel bitter about it. It was not Arnold's fault, yet if only he had been here, Margery would not have had those hours of complicated anxiety. When it was most important that she should be at ease she had agonized over Arnold's absence. But it was of no use to think of what might have been. In a few hours he would arrive, cheerful, with excellent news of the book, with inquiries for Margery. But she was sleeping, at last she was able to sleep. That mattered so much more than anything else.

She was sleeping still, when, after dark had fallen, Mrs. Leveson heard the wheels of Arnold's arrival, and she went softly downstairs to meet him and break the news to him. And when she saw his face, for the moment she thought that

the news must have already been told him, for it was a tragic mask — white, tired, and grief-stricken, that he turned to her.

"Dear mother," he said, and she could see that he could scarcely frame the words. "I don't know how to tell you. The most dreadful thing has happened. The little bag which contained my manuscript — stolen. I put it into my carriage myself at Dover, and left the train to get a cup of tea. I came back and it was gone! Gone! I can scarcely believe it yet myself."

He sat down in a chair in the hall — a bent, stricken figure with trembling of his raised hands.

"It will kill me," he cried. "I don't feel as if I can face it. That book was my life, and it was so nearly finished. Of course, they will offer all sorts of rewards. I said I would cheerfully give £1,000 to get it back, and would not prosecute the thief, but they told me the chances of getting it back are not great. Prosecute? I would shake hands with and thank the thief who took it, provided only he would let me have it back; as for £1,000, I would give ten thousand — there is nothing I would not give. But they tell me the chances are that the thief, finding nothing of value — nothing of value; my God, the irony of that — in the bag, will sell it for a shilling or two and light the fire with my manuscript. He will light the fire then with my brains, with myself. I shall be burning in that garret. Or perhaps he will just throw it away — the dustman will find it on some rubbish heap with orange peel and broken bottles. What am I to do? What shall I do to-morrow morning? Or on any morning? I don't — I can't see what is to happen to me."

He passed his hand over his eyes in a dazed, blind manner.

"How is Margery?" he asked.

That bitterness against him which his mother could not help feeling during the long hazardous hours while she sat with Margery was gone. She knew what this loss was to him; from living with him so long she could appreciate the utter blankness which the future must just now present to him. Indeed, it was no wonder that he spoke of it first, that not until he had done that did he ask after Margery. He had come home without any thought of it being possible that he was not in time, without any idea that either birth or death could have yet taken place.

The servants had gone upstairs with his luggage, and mother and son were alone. She sat down on the bench beside him.

"Oh, my son," she said, "there is more yet for you to bear."

For one half second he forgot about his book; his loss at any rate ceased to occupy him entirely.

"Not Margery ——" he said.

"Ah, no, thank God," said she. "But, Arnold, her child was born this morning. But it scarcely lived. It passed from us almost as soon as it came. It was God's will, my darling, that it should be so."

"And she?" he asked.

"Of course, the next day or two will be very anxious, but she has been sleeping this afternoon, and was asleep when I came down. She wanted to be awakened when you came, but, of course, we mustn't do that. You will see her as soon as she wakes. She is being so good and so brave, but, as we

both know, Margery would be sure to be that. I don't think she has given a single thought to herself, or her own bitter, bitter disappointment. All her sorrow is for you. That is very wonderful, as it is she who has borne it all. . . . But then Margery is very wonderful. She asked me to tell you, so that you should know before you see her."

Arnold sat in silence with head down-bent.

"What is it all about?" he said at length. "What is the point of it? Poor, dear Margery! And she doesn't know about the loss of my book yet. She will feel it frightfully. We shall have no more readings together. Am I to tell her?"

With all her sympathy for him, with all her appreciation of what the loss of his book meant, Mrs. Leveson found it hard to follow him here. It was next to inconceivable that he should, just now, think of Margery's grief over this literary loss. It was egotism *in excelsis* that made him feel for Margery in this second blow that was coming upon her. That she would be profoundly grieved there was no doubt at all, but that, at this moment, Arnold should think how grieved she would be was a portentous thing. He could put the sense of his own loss into Margery's mind, and there weigh it against the loss that had come upon the mother. But his question must be answered, and answered patiently.

"No, dear, I think I should try to keep it from her," she said, "just for the present. Of course, she will be terribly grieved for you, but until its possible recovery has become hopeless there is no need to let her know. Ah, here is the nurse. I expect that means that Margery is awake."

The nurse had come down to say that this was so. Margery had asked if her husband had come, and he went upstairs.

She was lying on her side, facing the door by which he entered, and she smiled at him, holding out her hand. There was no effort in her smile; it simply welcomed him home, and she was — even now — overjoyed to see him. All day she had borne her loss alone, for no amount of sympathy from any but him could reach her. The loss was theirs, and now that he knew, he would be bearing the burden of it with her. Yet, had it been possible, she would have taken it all on herself.

He sat down by the side of her bed, while she still held his hand in hers, and spoke softly, pausing often.

"My darling, so you have come!" she said; "and mother will have told you about it. I have longed for you so, and I could not help worrying about your safety Arnold, dear, don't grieve too much. Please God, we shall have other children!"

He took her hand to his lips and kissed it, and the weak fluttering pressure of her fingers returned the caress.

"Yes, dearest," he said, "we must look forward, mustn't we? There is no loss that is irreparable, is there?"

And then, even while he sat with her hand in his, his mind went back to that which he told himself was an irreparable loss. He could not begin again; the very thought of putting (1) on the top right-hand corner of the first page was unthinkable.

"And you have had a good journey?" she asked. "There

was such a gale here two days ago. But you don't mind the sea, do you?"

"No; quite a good journey," he said, thinking of Dover. Margery was silent again, her soul finding peace in his presence, reaching out after him, longing to heal and minister to his wound.

"Mother has been such a dear," she said; "but I wanted you, you! And now you have come, I shall get well so quickly. And, Arnold dear, we must look at it like this. God has taken the baby from us, but . . ."

Margery paused again, thinking out her thought.

"God has taken it," she said, "but though He has taken, we can still give. We can be more than resigned — we must be more than that. We must offer baby to Him, hold it out to Him. That's what was worrying me so this morning, how to get that right. But I am sure that is it. And somehow, even in the middle of it, it makes one so tremendously happy to give."

The nurse had ordained that this interview was to last five minutes only, and she looked in again to indicate the close to it. Arnold got up and kissed Margery on the forehead.

"That is my dismissal," he said. "Sleep well, Margery dear. Get well. You are all I have got left."

Margery smiled.

"I don't flatter myself quite to that extent," she said. "How is the book? Walter told me it was going splendidly, that you were really pleased with it, and that means a great deal. Isn't it nearly finished?"

"So nearly, so nearly," said he, commanding his voice with difficulty. "It has got on famously. Good night, my darling!"

And he hurried from the room, fearing he might betray the terrible secret.

CHAPTER XV

FROM day to day Margery steadily regained her strength, but the main cause that produced this physical recuperation was mental. She had her place to fill, it was her business to help and comfort Arnold, and she must waste as little time as possible in being ill. Even at that first interview he had given her the impression of having received some stunning, unmanning blow, and her observation of him during the days that immediately followed confirmed that. It was clear that when he was with her, he made great efforts both to bear up himself and to help her, but his face bore the look of a man who was suffering internally and intensely. Sometimes even while he talked to her, he would break off short in the middle of a sentence, as if some summons had come to his mind which tore it away from what he was saying. This would happen even when she was asking him about his book, and though she often questioned him about it, inquiring into its progress, she could get very little from him. Then one morning, some three days after he had come home, she, eagerly on the lookout for anything that could reach him, or make the desolation of his grief the less, suddenly thought, with a pang of self-reproach at not having done so before, of something he might be brooding over without wanting to speak to her about it.

"Arnold, dear," she said. "I feel sure there is something on your mind which you won't speak to me about, and I feel

almost sure that I have guessed what it is. You mustn't think of it any more. It is passed to begin with, and besides, it was in no way your fault."

It was impossible that she should know; nobody could have told her of his loss.

"Tell me, then," he said.

"You are reproaching yourself, dear, I think," she said, "for not having been with me when it all happened. You mustn't do that. I am afraid that at first I reproached you, too, but that was wrong of me. To begin with I had encouraged you to stay at Athens ——"

"Ah, if I had never gone to Athens!" he exclaimed.

"No; don't say or think that. It was quite right for you to go, and, after all, it is a little consolation, isn't it, to know that you did the best work perhaps of your life there? I should think of that so much if I were you. People are so absurd sometimes, they think because they are in great grief, that it is heartless to take pleasure in other things. Why, it is just the presence of other things that makes one pull through. If it wasn't for you and mother and your book, I shouldn't care to live. But not only do I care to, but I want to very, very much. Life will be lovely again. So if that is it, dear, promise me you will not reproach yourself any more. We couldn't have told. You were quite right to stop."

Margery leaned toward him in bed, her soul shining in her eyes.

"And I wish you would set to work again, dear," she said. "Mother told me you hadn't touched a book since you came back. I know it won't be easy for you, but do, to please me,

if for no other reason, sit down for a couple of hours every morning and try. I hate to think of you doing nothing, nursing your grief. Your work is there, whatever has happened. Just as good as ever."

She paused a moment.

"And I want to confess," she said. "Before now, I have been jealous of your work now and then, though I have always been so proud of it. I used to think sometimes that you put it first, wicked little beast that I was — that you really cared more for it than anything. Do you forgive me?"

"Oh, my dear!" he said, "as if there was anything to forgive."

"Then to show me how wrong I was, do try to take it up again. I shan't be jealous of it now. Won't you try?"

Arnold got up; it was hard to face the candour and love of Margery's eyes. Soon she would have to be told, but not just yet. He went across to the window, looking out, feeling himself planted, without any fault of his, in a hypocrite's place. It was not, as he well knew, only the baby's death that had thus utterly knocked the bottom out of his life, though he was bitterly disappointed about that; he knew also that if that had been all, he would not have wasted a day, but with excellent common sense have taken his mind off this irreparable business by some hard work. It would have been foolish to have done otherwise, but now that great anodyne for pain was taken from him.

"Won't you try?" she asked again.

"I can't! I simply can't!" said he.

Then came a gentle knock at the door, and Mrs. Leveson entered.

"A telegram for you, dear," she said to Arnold.

He opened it, gave but one glance at the two words it contained, and then gave a great sigh.

"Thank God! thank God!" he said. "Margery, my darling, such news. Yes, mother, it has been found."

The change in him was instantaneous, complete. The listless, tragic face was irradiated; his eyes sparkled, his mouth wreathed itself in happy curves.

"We must tell Margery now!" he said, and his selfishness was not the less sublime, because he thought he was thinking about her. "The most dreadful thing, my dearest, happened on my way home, and since we knew how miserable it would make you, I determined not to tell you until I had absolutely given up hope, though I longed for your sympathy. My bag was stolen at Dover while I had a cup of tea on the platform. It contained the whole of my manuscript, the only copy. And it has been recovered! What readings we shall have, dear. I have been so dreading that you would ask me to read to you, as I did in those delicious days in the autumn, and I should have to rack my brains for excuses. Of course, they will send it on at once. It might even be here this evening. How one longs to know all the details of its recovery! I shall telegraph back at once, saying I am sending the reward I promised."

He looked at Margery, and in his own intense relief saw nothing of the change that had come over her face. Nor did he notice the change in her voice, though from it all the eager, tender yearning to comfort him had passed away. There was no need to comfort him any more. The telegram had done that better than she could.

But though that was gone, there was intense cordiality in her tone.

"Oh, Arnold, how dreadful it must have been for you!" she said. "I am glad. I am glad it has been found."

"Thank you, my dearest. And were we not right to keep it from you? It would have worried you, and, as it now turns out, it would have worried you unnecessarily. I will just go and send my telegram, and then come back."

Mrs. Leveson remained with Margery, whom she had not yet seen that morning.

"You look ever so much better, dear," she said; "and the nurse tells me you slept well."

"Yes, I slept beautifully," said Margery, not smiling. And then quite suddenly she began to cry.

"My dear, what is it?" asked Mrs. Leveson.

"N — nothing. It's me. It's — it's this beastly little me. I am glad, though, that it has been found. I stick to that. . . ."

Margery made a tremendous effort with herself and checked her sobs.

"I deserve to be whipped," she said. "And I should equally deserve it if I said a single word more about why I began to cry, even to you. And you mustn't try to guess. I should be so ashamed if you guessed. I feel ever so much better this morning, and Arnold's book is found. Hurrah, hurrah!"

There was no need for Mrs. Leveson to guess; she already knew, and before Arnold left the room she could cheerfully have boxed his ears for the thoughtlessness of his intense relief at the finding of his book. She divined, unerringly,

exactly how Margery felt, knew, too, how inevitable it was that she should feel like that, and that she should blame herself for so feeling. She had so longed to comfort Arnold, and in the very comfort she gave him she would find her own; but rejoicing as she did that he was already so much comforted (though not by her), she could not but . . . but resent the nature of his comforter. All these past days she had felt so close, so at one with him, in their grief; it even was assuaged because he cared so, because they were together in it. And now, from the change that had so instantly come over him, it was inevitable that she should know how great a part of his listless depression, his apathy, his grief, came not from that at all, but from the loss of his manuscript. No wonder he could not work; she knew why now. It was not that his work had lost its savour, for already he promised her readings, since it was found again. But though of all this complication of feelings it was hard to say what was uppermost in her mind, her intention was clear enough. "Hurrah" expressed exactly what she chose to feel, what her will felt.

Her convalescence progressed rapidly. Rapidly, also, progressed Arnold's book, which, registered and insured and made as safe as postal regulations could manage, arrived next morning with an account of its adventures.

"A romance — I declare it's a romance," said the consoled author. "Think, mother; it was picked up from under the bed of a lodging-house by a servant who was cleaning the room. It must have been touch-and-go whether she put it on the fire. But she kept it, as it seemed neatly written and might prove to be of value, and only next day she read in the *Courier* my advertisement and reward. It is clear that

she was not the thief, as Tuesday was not her afternoon out, whatever that is. They ask if I wish search to be made for him, and if I will prosecute. Good gracious, no! He may go in peace as far as concerns me. Think of him, too, if he sees my advertisement! How he will gnash his teeth at the thought of what he has missed. I have a good mind to dedicate the book to him — 'To the unknown thief' — *ἀγνωτῶ κλέπτη.*

"How excited Margery will be when I tell her of it. Would it be better not to tell her just yet? Would the excitement be bad for her, do you think?"

"I feel sure it would not," observed his mother.

They were at breakfast together. Arnold dissected a poached egg, so that the yolk fell on the toast below it instead of being spilled on the plate. The performance was academically perfect. Academically perfect also was his speech. It was exactly for that reason that his mother found it so profoundly unsatisfactory.

"I don't think you do Margery justice," he said. "She has had another excellent night, by the way. I asked before I came down. But you don't do her justice, dear mother. She is more intelligent — that is the wrong word — more intellectually disposed than you could possibly guess. She doesn't put that side of her forward; she is hardly conscious of it herself. But it is there; she doesn't know how much stimulus she has given me, all so quietly. But I know about that better than you, and I think the account of the finding of my manuscript might excite her unduly. Of course, one cannot be certain. And there is the other side to it. A little excitement might do her good. Perhaps she wants a

little rousing. She was so right, dear girl, in wanting me to take up my work again at once, without knowing how tragic a reason lay at the bottom of my idleness. And I want her to divert her mind from this dreadful misfortune which has befallen us both, even as she wanted me to. So perhaps you are right. I will read Margery the history of the book's adventures after breakfast, and you may be sure I shall be on the lookout for any signs that show it is too exciting for her. Or shall I let the nurse read it first, and take her opinion on the matter?"

Arnold had finished his poached egg, and was cutting himself a liberal helping of ham from the sideboard, so that he did not hear his mother say, more to herself than him, "My poor Arnold." In truth, at the moment he seemed to her to be of bankrupt sort. All his thoughts of Margery sprang from the root idea of how immensely interested she must be in him; was she fit for the excitement that the recovery of the book would certainly cause her? Indeed, it was a tragic poverty. And the worst feature about it was that it was wholly unconscious; there was nothing within him of nobler and richer nature which told him of his beggary. He went on with sublime infatuation.

"And afterward I shall do as dear Margery wished me," he said, "and have a good morning's work, and settle down into old ways again. And after tea I shall find out whether she would like to be read to. The introduction is quite finished, and, without conceit, I think she will share my belief that it is not badly done. How wise and thoughtful she was, wanting me to take to work again. After all, that is the great panacea, is it not?"

These excellent resolutions were duly put into practice, and for the next few weeks Arnold was a model of industry, while every day after tea he more than cheerfully gave up to Margery as much time as he was allowed to spend with her. He saw her also every morning before he came down, but the after-breakfast visits were abandoned, since, with the evening hours cut off, he could not well make inroads into the morning also. He told himself, even as he told her, that it was an effort very often to concentrate himself on the age of Pericles, since his mind called him back again and again to the dreadfull loss they had suffered, but he made these efforts willingly, and, it must be confessed, with considerable success. It would not do to relax them; it was cowardly to sit down and brood over the inevitable past. One had to make the best of what lay before one. And he quoted Wordsworth with great appropriateness:

> "Let us grieve not, only find
> Strength in what remains behind."

"Isn't it so, my darling?" he would say as he took the elastic band off the chapter he had brought up to read her. "And now shall I read to you?"

"Yes, please, Arnold," said Margery. And she would look at him gravely with eyes that were beginning to see him and to understand him.

But her bodily health mended very rapidly, and Walter's month of leave was not yet over before she could be carried downstairs and wheeled out into the garden. There the terrace walk facing due south was sheltered from such chill as might be in the wind, and the last week of February saw

her spending many morning hours in the warm spring sunshine. Mrs. Leveson was often with her, and every morning after she could come down Walter rode over from Ballards; then, too, punctually at the striking of one o'clock Arnold came out from his study, and supplemented the quiet exercise of his stroll by wheeling her up and down, giving her the report of his morning's work, or talking over with her and Walter the plan that was shaping itself for spending the month of April in Athens.

"We might even start a little before that, my dear," he would say. "I would willingly arrange to do that, and leave the last two chapters to be written there. You need a change, and the sooner you take it the better. I shall give myself a week's holiday when we arrive, and take you every day to see some new thing, quite in the Athenian mode. And I think Walter must arrange an expedition to Nauplia to see Tiryns and Myceuse. I wonder if you will be up to that, Margery. You must not overfatigue yourself."

"I should like to start this minute," she said.

Arnold laughed.

"And I, too. Shall I get a wheelbarrow and put all my books and papers in it, and I will wheel that, and Walter will wheel you, and we will go straight to the station? Ah, there is the luncheon bell! Please begin without me. I omitted to put my papers straight before I came out. It looked so lovely this morning, and my head was full of our April plans."

At other times Margery would have established herself out here in some windless nook, and be left alone with a book or letters to write. But she read little and wrote

little: her mind was busy over things that mattered m
more.

The last few weeks, dating, to be accurate, from
moment of Arnold's receiving the telegram which said
manuscript had been recovered, had brought to her a revel
tion that must be faced. There was no longer any dou
about it; she saw clearly now that of which she had see
glimpses and fleeting visions all the autumn. She coul
no longer blame herself for thinking these things, or put them
down to jealous imaginations of hers; they were so. She was
not to Arnold what he was to her. She had to face that,
face it till her soul grew accustomed to it, without bitterness
and without blaming him. It was not his fault, she had but
blinded herself with her own love.

There were certain hopes that she must abandon. On
that day, when her child was born and died, while she still
waited with what passion and yearning for his return, she had
hugged one of these very close to her. She had hoped that
there would be some element, some balm more precious than
even Gilead bore, hidden in this grief of theirs, that it would
draw them closer together because their souls would find
each other, as it were, out alone in the wilderness of pain.
For several days she had seen that hope burn brightly, seeing
his utter dejection and apathy. His grief, she thought,
kept him away from that other passion of his, namely, his
work; she and that flower-bud of life that had never fully
opened were, after all, the things most deeply enshrined in
his heart. Then had come the telegram and the account of
that which he had kept from her, and instantly, at the very
moment, the brightness of his eye, his intellectual alacrity,

had come back to him. What had come between him and his work was not she nor the loss of his child, but the loss of his work. Since then he had preached to her, and himself most successfully practised, the gospel of work. He would often urge her very tenderly (for she never did him the injustice of saying that he was not fond of her) to follow his example, to busy herself with anything, to take hold of life again. But as yet she could not, for the reason that she had erroneously assigned to his inability to do so on the first few days after his return.

Nobody could help her, and she must never, if she could avoid it, betray that she wanted help. The pain was hers only, and it was in herself, in her own nature, that she must find its remedy. It was in her own love for him that the remedy must lie (hidden as yet though it was from her), since in love there is healing for everything, and that healing is instantaneous and infallible.

It was not quickly nor by some flash of inspiration that Margery came to perceive this. Day after day and through long quiet hours of the night she worked at it, patiently, unremittingly struggling, refusing to allow herself to accept any conclusion that did not seem to her to be without flaw. Often and often she said to herself that she must try to alter the nature of her love for him, to salt it with common sense, to tone down the white shining of it, to make it a more everyday affair, more useful, more usable. But that had to be abandoned; it was no true remedy that demanded the marring of the best of her. Often she wondered if she felt the loss of her child too keenly. But then again she knew that that was impossible; besides, she had given it back to God,

though He had taken it. Day by day such possible remedies occurred to her, but she gently put them aside, and whether she was alone or whether Walter or Arnold or her mother-in-law was with her, underneath the surface of talks and reading, the hidden spring of thought circled and flowed, feeling its way up out of the darkness into light.

And during this last week of February she saw another thing, and wondered at her blindness. She saw that Walter loved her, that he had loved her all along, since the April days of their childhood together. And yet there had been nothing strange in her blindness, for he had never by word or look or sign betrayed himself. Nor did he betray himself now; it was by her own light that Margery discovered it, by the need of love for which she craved as a child for food, innocently, instinctively, but imperatively. He gave her what Arnold never gave her, though till now she had not fully seen that her husband's affection for her — genuine and fairly deep as it was — lacked the royal quality. But knowing now that it lacked it, she saw how that royalty shone in Walter. It was not what he did, for he did no more than push her bath-chair, resigning it to Arnold when he came out on the stroke of one, he did no more than read to her, talk to her of the Athenian plans, the maturing of the spring, his ride, his mother, his dogs, But the royal quality was there in those simple things, and it was part of its royalty that it walked *incognito*, clothed itself in the garb of common folk, or at the most in the garb of a friend. Had it been in any way untrue, had it fallen by a hair-breadth short of the highest, it would have made itself known, would have put on its crown, so to speak, and demanded recognition.

But apparently it did not desire to be recognized; it was more than content to exist, knowing itself. . . .

And then the light shone on Margery. She knew she need no longer worry herself about what she was to do, how adjust herself to the place she occupied with regard to her husband. She had only got to love; nothing else was her concern.

CHAPTER XVI

ARNOLD and Margery — he after a two months' absence only — arrived in Athens in the early days of April, finding that spring, no pale-eyed Primavera, but the violent, hot-blooded youth of the south, had preceded them. This was no tentative guest, uncertain of his welcome, as was his maiden sister of the north, who is warm with sun on one day and lashed with hail on the next, who is forward and shy in turns, and smiles for a moment but to lose herself in tempest of gray weeping the next. Here her brother had come, like young Dionysus, conquering, irresistible, lord of the year. Already, before their arrival, his coming had been made known by the wide-eyed opening of the anemone, his harbinger, and to-day, when Walter met them at the Peiræus (for they had chosen the longer sea-voyage from Marseilles in preference to the faster and more fatiguing land journey to Brindisi), the corn-fields, milky-green with the upspringing of the blade, were starred with the inimitable scarlet of the southern poppy. Overhead the sky was turquoise, as untarnished as the sapphire of the sea over which they had come, and where feathers of cloud flecked it, they were no more than the lines of dazzling spray which the cutting bows of their steamer had churned to a momentary whiteness. Past blue island-sides they had sped, but ever through a halcyon sea, and as the hours passed and Athens grew nearer the excitement that possessed Arnold communicated itself

also to her, so that she almost expected that here at last would come some supreme solution of her difficulties, even as there awaited him the end and accomplishment of his book.

Margery knew well that the answer to all that made her heart ache had been correctly guessed by her. Somehow, her own love contained the complete solution, but it did not follow that because that was indubitably so the application of the certain truth became easy. And, indeed, in the days that followed, the application of it became increasingly difficult. Arnold, back again in the place that had given him so many hours of his happiest inspiration, found that same inspiration waiting for him again, and in the knowledge of that forgot all else. Often before Margery had seen him absorbed by his work, but never before had she guessed how complete that absorption could be. He had arranged that they should have the same sitting-room in the Hôtel de la Grande Bretagne which had been to him so congenial a study, but it required but the lapse of an hour or two on the first morning after their arrival to show Margery that its congeniality to him was bracketed with his solitude there. Already, too, the days had been planned; he would work all the morning, he would be out with her during the afternoon, returning in time to have a couple of hours more alone before dinner. The evening was to be given up to Patience and conversation. No doubt Walter would often come in to dine, but it was no part of the plan to dine out, as that involved possible breaking of the thread of work. Besides — this was an after-thought — they could not dine out so shortly after their bereavement.

Certain modifications of the settled routine had to be made.

Margery, for instance, at once perceived that during the sacred hours her presence disturbed him, and she absented herself after breakfast from their sitting-room, and similarly after tea. And he did not notice her absence any more than a man notices the absence of a fly that has been worrying him when he wants to doze. She was only noticeable when she was there. Again the rule about not dining out was capable of readjustment when the head of the British School of Archæology desired their presence. Arnold explained his acceptance of the invitation to her, though he did not urge her to go herself.

"Dr. Dörpfeld, I am told, is going to be there," he said; "and above all things I want to hear his conclusions about the position of the Long Walls, the excavation of which was going on when I was here last. I have formed my own opinion, but I should be vastly more comfortable if I found he agreed with me. After all, the dinner will be more of the nature of an archæological conference than of a festive occasion. I think I should be sorry, my darling, to miss it. But I would not have you go if you do not feel inclined. I dare say Walter would dine with you quietly."

Margery agreed to this: agreed with the whole-hearted willingness of love, that wanted him to do what he liked, without even tacit argument. Indeed, the only argument that she could have raised was on the score of his inconsistency with himself: the forms of mourning meant very little to her. Her genuineness felt that there was no such thing as conventionality in these matters. She would have dined out any and every night if Arnold had liked.

But her serenity, in spite of all this, but deepened daily, so

also did her happiness. That very simple discovery that it was not necessary to do anything except merely to love was (though, as has been said, the application of it was often difficult) a panacea that could not fail. She might fail, and often did, in its application, but there was no doubt about the genuineness of the recipe. There was no other recipe for anything.

It was, then, in the growing fulness of this knowledge that she sat one morning alone on the steps of the Propylæa, the white marble gates to the Acropolis. Walter had driven up with her, and had sat with her and strolled with her a little, but then he had to get back to the Legation to attend to his duties. He had found her waiting for him outside the hotel when he called, for Arnold had already started his morning's work.

"I love to see anybody as happy as Arnold," she said as she stepped into the little jingling pair-horsed victoria. "Happy as the day is long is no expression for him. He is as happy as life is long, or, anyhow, as his book is long ——"

"Getting on all right?" asked Walter.

"Ah, dear Walter, you don't care about it," she said. "If you knew how I cared! It is such a big piece of his happiness. But what comes next? Won't he feel rather lonely when it is finished? Or will he feel so tremendously happy because it is done? Wouldn't it be nice to be able to create something like that? I can't envy Arnold, but I think I envy everybody else who creates. It's — it's like making a star. You can see it shine every evening."

"Not strictly astronomical," remarked he.

"No; it's a superior sort of star. I wish I could help it to shine."

Walter looked rather absently at the column of the temple of Zeus Olympias, which they were passing.

"You want to help everybody to shine, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I do. It's natural, isn't it? If one can't be silver oneself, the next best thing is to be plate-powder."

Walter stretched out his long legs. A large foot had to be put outside the limits of the victoria. There was a good deal of unspoken instinct in the movement. It was as if he freed himself from the cramps that bound Arnold.

"You are the best plate-powder," he observed. "Arnold has never done so well before. He says his Egyptian book wasn't a patch on this. And he says that you are tremendously connected with this."

"I'm not," said she quickly, without consideration.

Then she considered.

"But how dear of him to say it," she added, "and to think it. But he's quite wrong all the same."

They had arrived at the end of their drive by this time and on foot mounted the steps of the Propylæa. Walter had told the driver to wait to take him down again, and as they went up the jingle of the horses' bells as they shook their necks against the worrying of the flies sounded clear and sharp. Above, a few hawks circled high and wide across the blue, and somewhere on the rocks of the Acropolis a raven croaked. And, for the moment, anyhow, these sounds of sentient life appealed more to Margery than the austere beauty of columns and architrave. The latter were beauti-

ful, but they were dead, of stone. And Walter, her dear friend, was closer to her heart than Arnold's book. All things combined at the moment to make human and living things dearer to her than any theory or reconstructed history: the sun was warm overhead, the poppies blazed in cracks and crevices of the rocks, spring stirred in her bones; she was young, and her friend, who never failed her, walked by her side.

And then by a sort of loyalty which had become habitual to her she pulled herself back.

"I am expecting to hear every day that the book is finished," she said, "and I rather guess that it is nearer than Arnold has told me. I fancy he means to make a tremendous surprise of it."

"I'm afraid it will be rather a failure, then," said he, "considering that you have guessed."

"Yes, but he won't know," said Margery. "I shall make it appear a tremendous surprise. And then I expect we shall go on that expedition to Nauplia. You will come with us, won't you?"

"If I'm asked," said Walter.

"Oh, you will be asked. Arnold likes to have you with us. He is very fond of you."

"Is he?"

"Yes, and I don't a bit wonder, do you know?"

"I am getting slightly embarrassed," remarked Walter. "I feel like a dog that knows it is being talked about. I must put an end to my embarrassment, though, by instantly getting back to the Legation. I am already late."

So he had gone, and, left alone, Margery again let the warm

spring sunshine, the wheeling of the hawks, the blowing of the scarlet poppies, and all the promise of summer sink into her. But, for herself, she could not quite see what that summer was to be. The hope that had lifted up her heart all autumn and winter had passed; her child was dead, and neither its birth nor death had brought her and her husband any closer. . . . Perhaps when his book was finished he would become humanized again, even as he had been during the first six months of their marriage. Or would he set to work again at once? That was quite possible: he had often blamed himself when his work had not been going well for having "wasted" so much time earlier in the year. "Wasted"; the word had dropped like lead into Margery's soul! Had she "wasted" those months too? Had all her life been waste because she had never done a piece of original work? Was it waste of time to spend the hours in loving? She wished he had not spoken of those months as "wasted."

She had moved up from the Propylæa steps and crossed the rock to where stood the great temple of Athene, and strolled up and down on the southern side of it, between its long white marble steps and the south edge of the Acropolis rock, which went down some sheer fifty feet on to the topmost lines of seats of the theatre of Dionysus below. A little wall some two or three feet in height only defended the edge of the precipitous cliff, and Margery sat perched on this and looked over the expanse of green Attic plain. Beyond, to the left, rose the purple slopes of Hymettus, straight in front across the plain was the sea, to the right the hills of the Peloponnese made a thin blue band between the blues of sea

and sky. Everything seemed bursting with spring and with beauty, everything teemed with wonder and interest, and yet to her this morning the beauty and wonder of the world seemed remote and inaccessible. If it was waste of time to love and to be loved, what was there in the world worth doing? Or was Arnold right? Were we all sent here to acquire knowledge and read books, even if we could not write them?

The thought came and stood by her, insistently close, demanding an answer. And she could only give it the one her heart told her was the right one. Everything else was waste of time unless it was embroidered, as it were, on to the fabric of love, which must support and hold it all together. Though she might understand all mysteries and all knowledge, though she might give her body to be burned. . . . It was just that, just that. She had no other answer to give to the insistent question.

Margery was idly tracing lines and curves with her fingertips on the stone on which she sat, and, suddenly becoming aware that there were irregularities on its smooth surface, looked more closely, and saw what was undoubtedly half-erased letters of some inscription. She could read one or two letters, but for the most part they were badly defaced, and weather-worn beyond her power of deciphering. She wondered if by any chance the stone had escaped the notice of archæologists, and she must remember to tell Arnold. What a wonderful thing if she had made a discovery. She would not have wasted her morning then.

She heard a step that suddenly struck her as the most familiar step in the world close to her, behind her. Of course

it could not possibly be Arnold, since she had left him only an hour ago, settled down to the employment of the sacred hours till lunch-time. But she turned quickly, and saw that it was he.

"You, dear?" she said. "What has happened?"

He smiled and sat down on the stone beside her.

"Oh, nothing — nothing of the least importance!" he said. "I thought I would come up and spend the morning with you, instead of boring myself any more over my book. It seemed a waste to spend any more time over it."

Margery had guessed, but she kept up her sham in this little farce with great spirit.

"Oh, dear, has it stuck again?" she asked, "as it did in January? I *am* sorry!"

"Yes, it has stuck," said he; "I can't do any more. Because it is finished."

Margery jumped up.

"Oh, Arnold, my dear!" she said. "Although it's a public place, and it's broad day, I must give you a kiss."

He was really moved by her enthusiasm.

"And do you know what I am going to give you, dear?" he said. "The book itself; it shall be dedicated to you!"

"Me?" she said. "Darling, how I shall love that! You are giving me all — all that you value most. It"—suddenly she began to stammer — "it is y-yourself you g-give me. It is dear of you. I c-can't thank you. It would be s-s-silly to try."

Then she remembered her inscription. Perhaps even she could give him something of the same coin.

"But you must get up a moment, dear," she said. "Per-

haps I have made a discovery. Look where you have been sitting. Are those not letters?"

He turned round and saw.

"Margery!" he said. "This is tremendous. It's new; nobody has ever noticed it before. You have just found it?"

"Ten minutes ago."

The letters were, as has been said, much defaced, and the angle at which the sun struck them, for any one standing where they stood, made it very hard to read.

"If I just get on to the top of the wall I shall see better," said he.

He jumped up and knelt down on it.

"Is it quite safe?" asked she.

He paid no attention.

"Alpha, Theta," he said. "Athena ——"

Suddenly Margery saw a crack run through the mortar that held the roughly-built work together.

"Arnold!" she screamed.

Then the piece on which he knelt toppled over. From below she heard the sound of that which fell striking the rocks, and the bowling of stones down the steep slope.

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS the month of May, a year later, and Margery, on a visit to Aunt Aggie, was sitting in the room that had been the schoolroom and had in process of time become known as hers. Nothing had been changed in it, there was still a tuft of horsehair projecting out of the armchair that stood by the fire; the table that she and Walter had made still stood on three of its legs, preferring to make no use of the fourth, the brilliant sunset still burned behind the stuffed form of Tapioca, and wadding protruded from the beak of a canary in a case close by.

Once, when she sat there alone, as she did now, she read with absorbed wonder the book on Alexandria which Arnold had sent her; to-day she had just opened his book on the Age of Pericles, which had arrived from the publishers that morning. She knew it well, for it was she who had been through all the proofs of it, and as preface there was half a page of print, written by herself, saying that the book had been finished only on the morning of his death, and had had no revision at his hands. It was given to the world, therefore, exactly as he had left it.

Margery had been left, from the worldly point of view, extremely well off, and was, therefore, a person of some consequence in the eyes of Aunt Aggie. Furthermore, she seemed to have got a very numerous and devoted circle of friends, again an enviable possession, and Aunt Aggie looked

forward to the event that she believed to be imminent without much hostility or antagonism, except in so far that she felt always vaguely antagonistic to any plan by which she did not herself benefit. Indeed, in this case, she was likely to be the loser, since, if Margery married Walter, she and Olive — who had got a new crochet stitch — might have to leave Ballards. But Mrs. Morrison was not certain that she would mind that very much, for she had a tendency to rheumatism, and it was always worse at Ballards than in town. Besides, it was high time that Walter married, and she told herself that she would be a very selfish woman (which she was) if she let any thought of her personal comfort mar the completeness of her satisfaction. Besides, Margery, who would by this time have been Lady Northwood if only her husband had lived, was a very different *partie* to a girl picked up in a slum, where a barrel-organ played in front of the house where her mother lay dead.

Indeed, Mrs. Morrison was not sure that all things were not best as they were. She had never been able to understand why Arnold and Margery had left town in the very middle of the season, and all the affair about Arnold going to Athens and coming back too late required explanation. It got it, too; and long ago she had come to the conclusion that the marriage had been a very unhappy one, but that she herself had always been opposed to it, which was a comfort. True, one seldom got much thanks for doing one's best in this world, but she seldom looked for gratitude.

Walter was arriving from town that morning, and in point of fact, Mrs. Morrison had put off her daily interview with her cook until she had seen him. She wanted to talk to

him, to encourage him with regard to Margery. For she was quite sure that Margery was very fond of him, and she wished distinctly to say that she did not wish him not to marry on *her* account. It was only proper he should know that.

She glanced at the clock; Walter ought to have been here quite half an hour ago, and she rang her bell to say that she would see the cook now. Walter would have to wait if he arrived in the middle of that interview. But she learned, somewhat to her astonishment, that he had arrived quite punctually, and had been in the house for half an hour. Apparently, he had gone straight to Margery's room.

That was the case. She had got up when he entered, putting the book down on the table, and for a moment stood in silence, though she owed him an answer. Then she held out both hands to him.

"Yes, my dear," she said. Oh, such a "Yes!"

After that they talked.

THE END